

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

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No new changes

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MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 1

Hunting District: 121

Year: 2020

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

This season proposal eliminates the restriction where these permits are only valid in the Heron area and establishes the permits to be valid within the entire boundary of HD 121. Permits would be valid the day after the general season and run through February 15th. Permits would be only valid on private land excluding Stimson Lumber Company and Avista land. A total of 20 permits would be issued.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective would be a success rate of 75-80% for these permits and a decrease in game damage complaints in HD 121.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Many of the game damage complaints within HD 121 are from landowners with smaller acreage that experience depredation to hay stacks during winter. One benefit of these permits is that FWP can steer hunters to these damage complaint properties and hopefully reduce the damage. This is much easier and less time consuming than establishing a depredation hunt on these small acreages. Because of a quirk in the regulations two years ago, hunters were able to hunt the entire HD during the late season. FWP used hunters at several game damage areas with tremendous success.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The objective for this elk population is 1355 observed elk during the spring surveys. The population is currently at objective. Below are spring classification surveys for HD 121.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>						<u>Calves:</u>	<u>Bulls:</u>
	<u>Cows</u>	<u>Calves</u>	<u>Spikes</u>	<u>BTB</u>	<u>Bulls</u>	<u>Uncl.</u>	<u>100</u> <u>Cows</u>	<u>100 Cows</u>
1986	314	183	39	75	114	95	706	58
1987	425	230	56	21	77	124	856	54
1988	550	268	69	28	97	128	1043	49
1989	656	243	59	48	107	20	1025	37
1990	768	283	82	77	159	28	1238	37
1991	605	249	65	50	115	22	991	41
1992	529	195	68	44	112	17	853	37
1993	763	194	79	82	161	33	1151	25
1994	501	152	48	78	126	24	803	30
1995	487	186	34	62	96	99	868	38
1996	638	121	30	76	106	0	865	19
1997	515	89	30	28	58	0	662	17
1998	553	101	39	59	98	53	805	18
1999	716	215	45	66	111	6	1048	30
2000	792	251	60	63	123	8	1174	32
2001	706	223	65	36	101	31	1061	32
2002	788	208	88	81	169	18	1183	26
2003	1039	272	97	51	148	43	1502	26
2004	906	211	84	81	165	46	1328	23
2005	943	215	94	91	185	189	1532	23
2006	878	210	94	90	184	37	1309	24
2007	1074	211	130	128	258	60	1603	20
2008	984	141	90	111	201	30	1356	14
2009	977	169	50	101	151	42	1339	17
2010	982	271	67	68	135	66	1454	28
2011*	666	121	41	26	67	8	862	18
2012	1022	202	77	43	120	74	1418	20
2013	1036	258	55	76	131	117	1542	25
2014**	1140	313	39	51	90	15	1558	28
2015	1065	273	94	39	133	33	1504	26
2016	1169	323	71	60	131	30	1653	28
2017	1260	164	86	57	143	19	1586	13
2018**	1186	218	61	39	100	6	1510	18
2019	1097	190	79	49	128	3	1418	17

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

10-YR AVG.	1082	233	69	65	134	43	1492	22	13
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* Poor greenup conditions. Field survey only.

Not included in 10-year average.

** Limited survey in side drainages because of poor greenup and snowy conditions.

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Typically snow conditions are very good during the winter which should result in a good harvest. Private landowners are generally good about allowing hunters access and should be more agreeable under game damage situations.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

A few sportsmen and some landowners have been contacted with everyone in support.

Local game warden Troy Hinck is also in support.

Submitted by: Bruce Sterling, Area Wildlife Biologist

Date: 1 October 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Hunting Districts: 140

Year: 2020

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

This proposal would remove the antlerless elk permit 140-00 in hunting district 140. Currently, we issue 5 antlerless elk permits in this district. This proposal would not impact the archery or general rifle season for elk in HD 140.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of this proposal is to reduce the overall harvest of cow elk in HD 140 to help alleviate sources of female mortality in a population that has been apparently in decline.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Success will be measured by increase in elk numbers during spring surveys.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The current population objective for HD 140 is combined with HD's 130 and 141 and is as follows:

- 1) HDs 130, 140, and 141: Maintain a post-hunting season population of 150-320 observed elk.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Due to the forested nature of most of these hunting districts, the only population surveys we conduct are spring green-up surveys in HD 140. No surveys are conducted in 130 or 141. These surveys are conducted using a rotary winged aircraft and timed during optimal green-up conditions, when elk are concentrated in open meadows, south facing slopes and along exposed riverbanks. Survey numbers for elk in HD 140 have been below objective since 2015 (Figure 1). Likewise, hunter harvest has also seen a steep decline (Figure 2). Less than 5 cow elk a year are harvested annually, but make up a considerable portion of the overall harvest in the district.

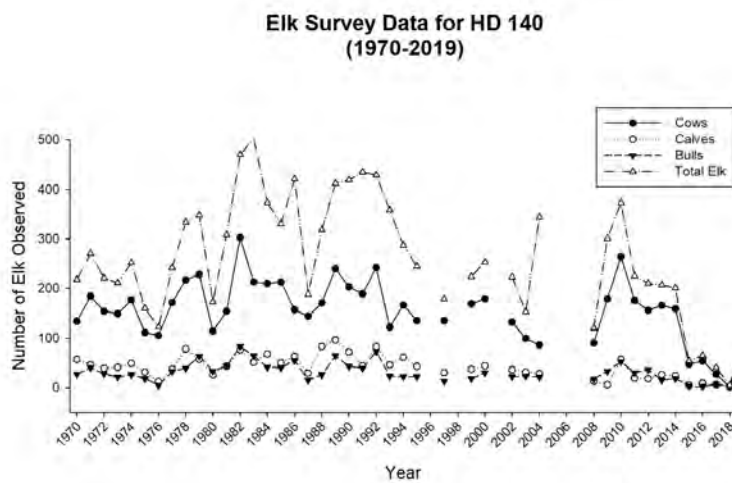


Figure 1. Survey data for elk in HD 140 (1970-2019).

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

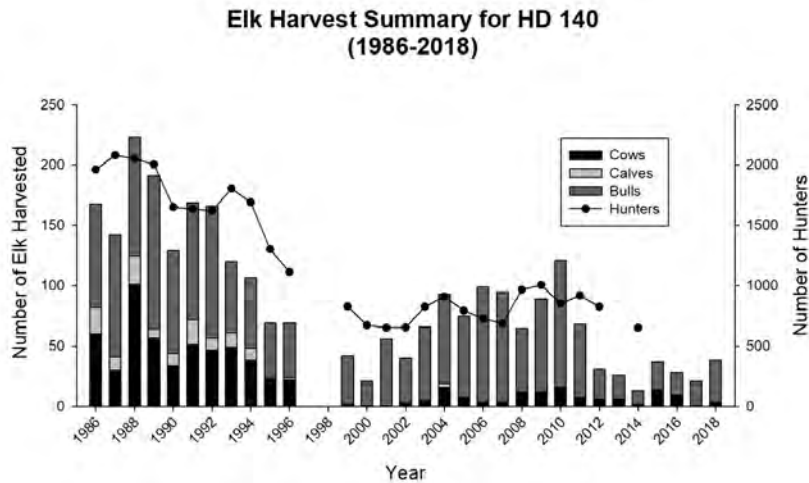


Figure 2. Harvest data for elk in HD 140 (1986-2018).

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Most of this hunting district is located within the Flathead National Forest with excellent hunter access. We do not anticipate this proposal to change hunter access.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

The issue of decreasing elk numbers in the South Fork of the Flathead River has been repeatedly discussed at numerous stakeholder groups since 2015. The general consensus is that elk numbers have been in steady decline and the department needs to take action to alleviate the decline.

Submitted by: Jessy Coltrane, Area Wildlife Biologist

Date: 10/17/2019

Approved: _____

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Hunting Districts: 141, 150, 151

Year: 2019

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

This proposal would remove antlerless elk from the archery only season in HDs 141, 150 and 151. Currently in HD 141 from Sept 7- Oct 20 and in HDs 150 and 151 from Sept 7 – Sept 14 hunters may take either a brow-tined bull or an antlerless elk by archery only. This proposal would eliminate the opportunity to harvest antlerless elk in these three districts.

2. **What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of this proposal is to eliminate the harvest of cow elk in HDs 141, 150 and 151 to help alleviate sources of female mortality in a population that has been in decline.

3. **How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Success will be measured by increase in elk numbers during spring surveys.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The current population objective for HD 141 is combined with HD's 130, 140 and 141 and is as follows:

- 2) HDs 130, 140, and 141: Maintain a post-hunting season population of 150-320 observed elk.

Due to the forested nature of most of these hunting districts, the only population surveys we conduct are spring green-up surveys in HD 140. No surveys are conducted in 130 or 141. These surveys are conducted using a rotary winged aircraft and timed during optimal green-up conditions, when elk are concentrated in open meadows, south facing slopes and along exposed riverbanks. Survey numbers for elk in HD 140 have been below objective since 2015 (Figure 1).

The current population objective for HD 150 and HD 151 is as follows:

- 1) HDs 150 and 151: Maintain a post-hunting season population of 310-500 observed elk.

Surveys in HD 150 are conducted during spring green-up, in conjunction with HD 140 surveys. Due to the forested nature of HD 151, no surveys are conducted in HD151, and therefore all population assessments are based on the HD 150 counts. Based on these surveys, elk numbers in HD 150 and 151 have been frequently at or below objective since 2008 (Figure 2).

Overall, the number of elk, as well as the bull:cow ratio and recruitment, have been chronically low in the wilderness areas of the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead Rivers (Figure 3). The calf:cow ratio exceeded 20 calves per 100 cows only once since 2008. The low survey numbers combined with low recruitment raises significant concern about the population of elk in the South and Middle Fork drainages. Therefore, we recommend eliminating any cow harvest in these hunting districts as a first step to reduce overall mortality.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

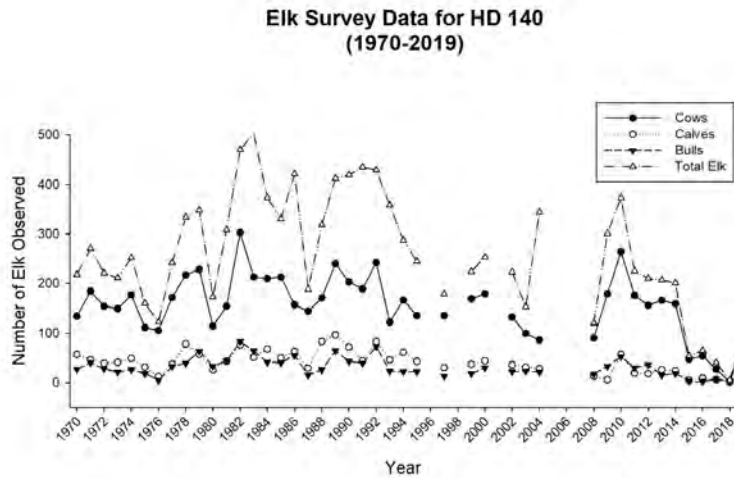


Figure 1. Survey data for elk in HD 140 (1970-2019).

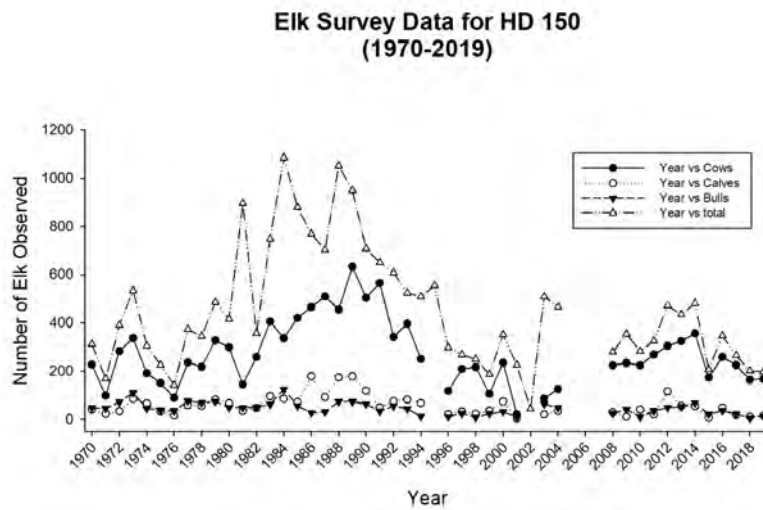


Figure 2. Survey data for elk in HD 150 (1970-2019).

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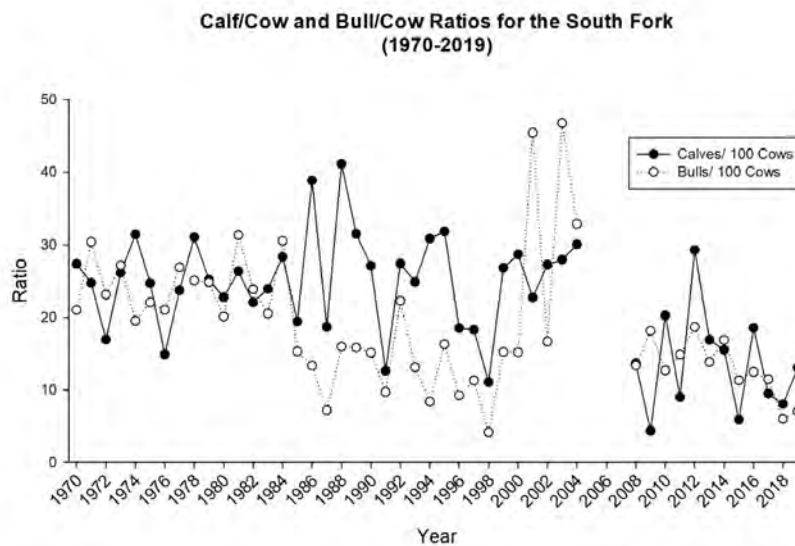


Figure 3. Calf/cow and bull/cow ratios for the South Fork of the Flathead River in HDs 140 and 150 (1970-2019).

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Most of this hunting district is located within the Flathead National Forest with excellent hunter access. We do not anticipate this proposal to change hunter access. These wilderness hunting districts experience deep snow compared to surrounding drainages. Winter severity can have significant impacts on elk survival, especially calf recruitment and bull survival.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

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The issue of decreasing elk numbers in the South Fork of the Flathead River has been repeatedly discussed at numerous stakeholder groups since 2015. The general consensus is that elk numbers have been in steady decline and the department needs to take action to alleviate the decline.

Submitted by: Jessy Coltrane, Area Wildlife Biologist

Date: 10/17/2019

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 2

Hunting District: 210, 211, 212, 216

Year: 2020

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

It is proposed to

- Remove the region-wide 002-00 B license in these hunting districts, and also from HD 214.
- Reduce 210-02 antlerless permits from 200 to 130.
- Implement 800 antlerless permits through the State-wide drawing.
 - Valid for rifle hunting from August 15 – day before general rifle season on private land only.
 - Valid on private lands and DNRC lands outside the National Forest Boundary during general rifle season.

*Note, please consider this proposal with the HD 211 and HD 212 boundary changes.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Objectives are:

- Remove B licenses that are no longer needed to reduce elk populations.
- Provide a late season game damage management tool for landowners enduring persistent game damage.
- Maintain the overall elk population at objective by reducing antlerless harvest.
- Focus management on private lands elk, with less pressure on public lands elk.
- Maintain working relationships and satisfaction with landowners and sportsmen.
- Keep regulations as simple as possible, while implementing hunting opportunities for effective elk population and distribution management.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be measured by:

- Harvest will be measured by annual hunter survey harvest estimates.
- Elk populations will be monitored during annual winter surveys.
- Game damage complaints will be tracked in the game damage database.
- Satisfaction with landowners and sportsmen will be measured at the hunter check station and from FWP game wardens, biologists, and block management staff receiving input from the community.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The Flint Creek Valley elk population has been declining and approaching the elk objective since the shoulder seasons and B license were applied in 2016. HD 210 holds the bulk of the elk population for this area during winter and is just above objective as of the 2019 winter elk counts (Figure 2). It is anticipated that the hunting districts in this valley will be at or below their combined objective by the end of the 2019-2020 shoulder season.

Antlerless elk harvest has increased with the shoulder season opportunities (Figure 4). This was the intended outcome as the elk populations had surpassed objective and were steadily growing. Shoulder season harvest on private land was estimated as 80% of the total antlerless harvest in 2019 for HD 210 (Figure 5) with elk antlerless permits providing the rest. Bull harvest has not changed significantly in recent years in HD 210 (Figure 3).

Harvest success with private land antlerless opportunities tends to be about 25%. With 800 private lands antlerless permits, we would estimate 200 elk to be harvested. This is adequate with current calf per 100 cow ratios (Figure 6) and could provide slow population growth, depending on winter severity in the coming years.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

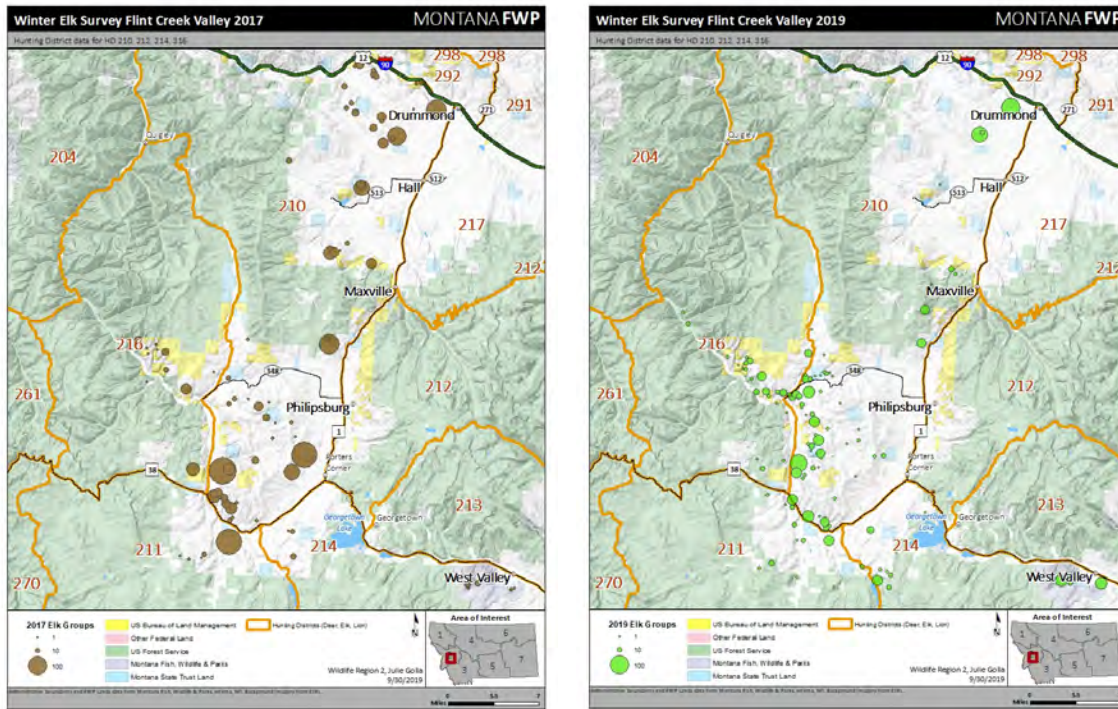


Figure 1. Maps of elk group size and distribution for the most recent 2 survey years in the Flint Creek Valley.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

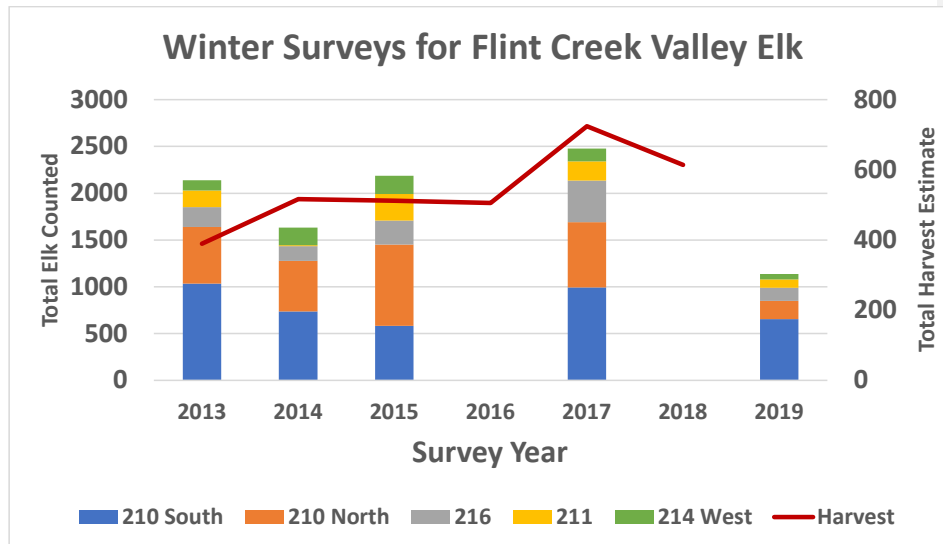


Figure 2. Annual winter survey results for the Flint Creek Valley. Objective for the combined hunting districts is between 2,160 and 1,440 elk, though hunting districts vary in being above, below, or at objective. Harvest estimates include both brow-tined bull and antlerless elk harvest.

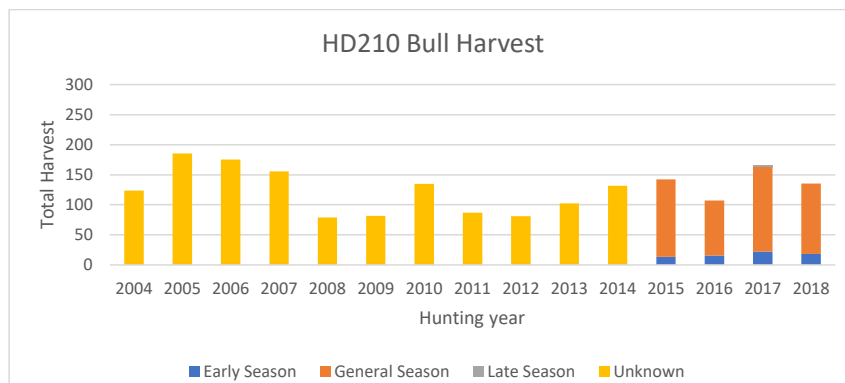


Figure 3. Bull harvest estimates from annual hunter surveys. Early season represents archery season harvest.

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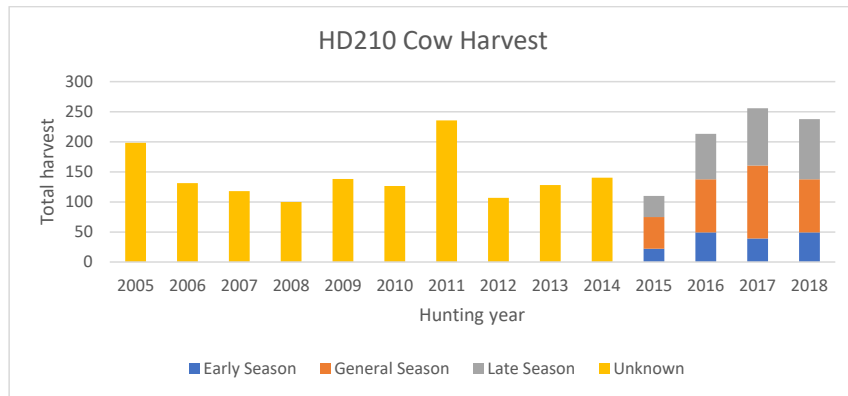


Figure 4. Cow harvest estimates from annual hunter surveys. Early season represents archery and shoulder season starting on August 15. Late season represents shoulder season after general rifle season to February 15.

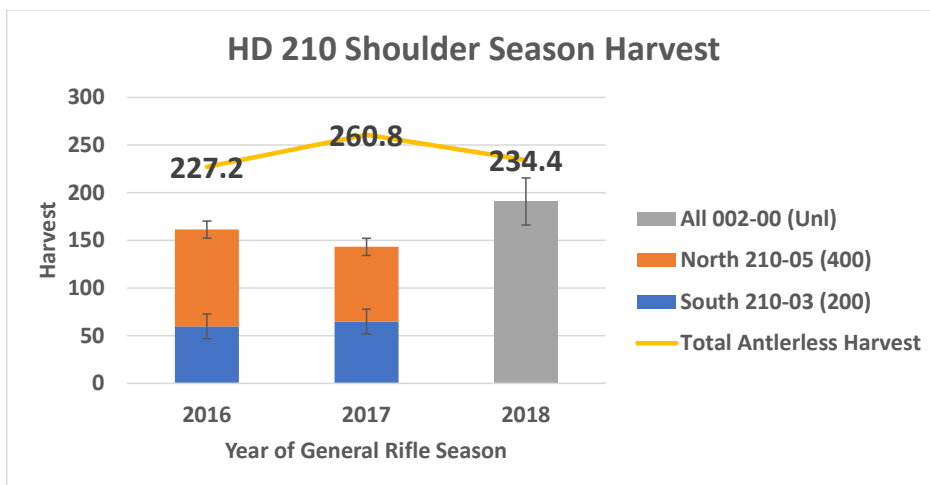


Figure 5. Antlerless harvest in HD 210. In 2016 and 2017, two separate B licenses were available for HD 210 through the June 1 drawing: 400 for the northern portion and 200 for the southern portion. North/south was separated by Henderson Creek Road west of Maxville in the map of Figure 1. The over-the-counter 002-00 B license was implemented for 2018-2019.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

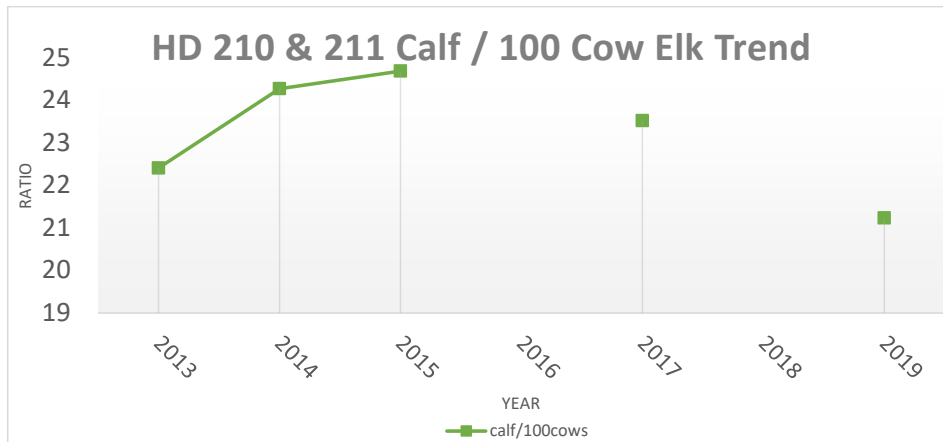


Figure 6. Calf per 100 cow ratios combined from surveys in HDs 210 and 211 of the Flint Creek valley. Hard winters in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 have impacted calf survival, in addition to antlerless harvest opportunities.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

HD 210 has a large percentage of private lands that the elk use as winter range (Figure

1) This can make elk management challenging for several reasons:

1. Most hunters prefer public land hunting, so less hunting pressure is applied to private land elk when given the option between public and private.
2. Depending on weather, elk may not arrive to wintering grounds in the Flint Creek valley until after general rifle season. Harvest post-general season is a necessary tool for consistent elk management.
3. Landowner tolerance of elk is low due to frustration when there is a lack of adequate tools to harvest and disperse private land elk.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

The purpose of this proposal is supported by landowners and sportsmen who currently participate in private land elk hunting both during general rifle and shoulder seasons in the Flint Creek Valley. The Anaconda Sportsmen's Club does not support shoulder seasons from August 15 to February 15, but see this proposal as a compromise with a limited

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

antlerless permit that does not have a structured late season listed in the regulations. It may only be valid after general rifle season with local Commissioner approval for winters that require it for game damage assistance.

Through several meetings with the FWP Region 2 Citizen Advisory Council, with the addition of local landowners and sportsmen, FWP staff and representatives have discussed at length the pros and cons of B licenses and shoulder seasons. This proposal is an adapted result of those meetings and the input provided by participants.

FWP staff have observed improved landowner relationships and satisfaction with the 002-00 B license and previous shoulder season opportunities. Hunting access on private lands is readily available for hunters pursuing antlerless elk in the Flint Creek valley. Landowners are concerned that they may be losing an efficient method to disperse elk off hay stacks in December-February.

Submitted by: Julie Golla

Date: November 15, 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Deer, Elk

Region: 2

Hunting District: HDs 212 and 213

Year: 2020

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

In consideration of new boundaries for HDs 212 and 213, it is proposed to:

- Move all Prison Ranch language, regulations, and season dates from HD 212 to HD 213
 - Note with HD description: Hunters must contact Prison authorities between Aug 1 - Dec 15 of the current license year at 406-846-1320 x2351 for permission to access the Prison Ranch.
 - General deer license valid general rifle season to January 1 for either-sex white tailed deer on Prison Ranch ArchEquip only area.
 - General elk license valid general rifle season to January 1 for antlerless elk or brow-tined bull elk on Prison Ranch ArchEquip only area.
 - WTD OTC B license 213-02 valid on private lands and also valid on Prison Ranch ArchEquip only area from day after general rifle season to January 1.
- Antlerless elk permit adjustments:
 - Reduce quota range for 212-00 antlerless elk permit to 5-150. Valid district-wide.
 - Increase quota range for 213-00 antlerless elk permit to 25-700, only valid in portion of HD 213 south of Rock Creek. Holders 16 and older may not hunt antlered elk in HD 213.
 - Remove 212-01 antlerless elk permit
 - Add 50 213-02 (range 5-120) only valid in portion of HD 213 south of Boulder Creek road. Holders 16 and older may not hunt antlered elk in HD 213.
- Remove 002-00 B license in HD 212.
- Include HD 212 in the Flint Creek Valley 210-03 private lands antlerless elk permit (see Flint Creek Valley antlerless elk permit justification)
- Replace 002-00 B license in HD 213 with 350 (range 5-500) 213-01 private lands B license from August 15- end of general rifle season.
 - August 15- day before general rifle season:
Valid on private lands, excluding Weyerhaeuser, Stimson, & Nature Conservancy lands.
 - General rifle season:
Valid on the above described private lands AND ALSO VALID on DNRC lands outside the National Forest boundary and FWP WMA's. Also valid on Montana State Prison Ranch in compliance with Prison Ranch access regulations.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Objectives are:

- To improve FWP hunting district boundaries by better mirroring landscape-level wildlife populations and management.
- Simplify hunting regulations by removing consistent duplications of deer and elk hunting opportunities in the current HDs 212 and 213.
- Maintain successful management regimes on the landscape by adjusting regulations to match new boundaries.
- Replace the unlimited 002-00 B license with a more controlled tool that is available to landowners facing game damage challenges.
 - 210-03 private lands antlerless elk permit in HD 212
 - 213-01 private lands B license in HD 213

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be measured by:

- Elk winter surveys will measure populations in relations to elk management objectives
- Annual hunter surveys will measure harvest estimates for game species, and deer population data will be extrapolated from harvest trends
- Satisfaction with hunters and landowners will be measured by FWP field staff.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The elk and deer populations of the current HDs 212 and 213 are over objective, though have been declining since introduction of private lands B licenses and shoulder seasons. Due to the frequent travel of large elk groups across the current Racetrack Creek boundary, annual winter surveys of elk groups can introduce variability in population estimates, leading to misleading individual hunting district populations (Figure 4). By changing the districts to different watersheds, future elk data will match the landscape and make elk management more consistent and effective.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

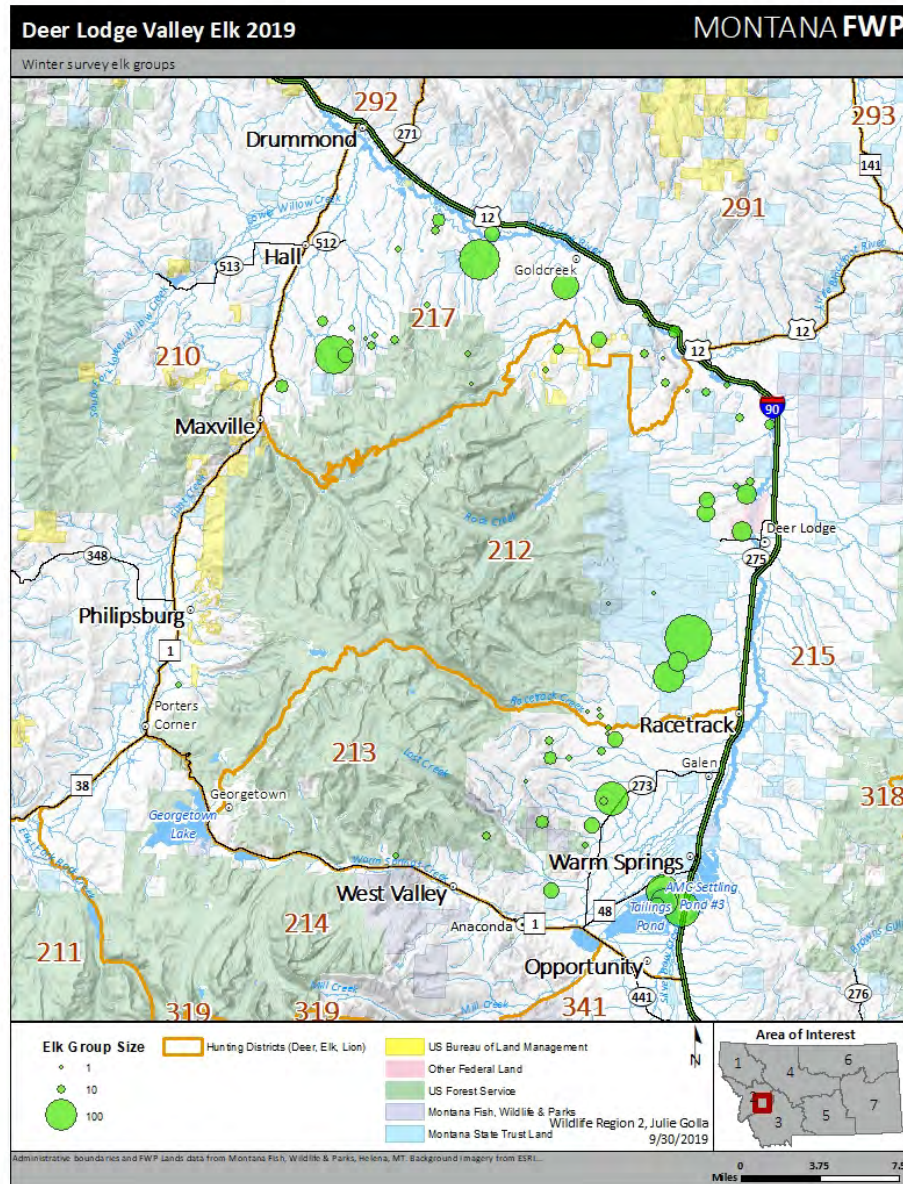


Figure 1. Elk distribution and group size in March 2019 during winter elk surveys.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

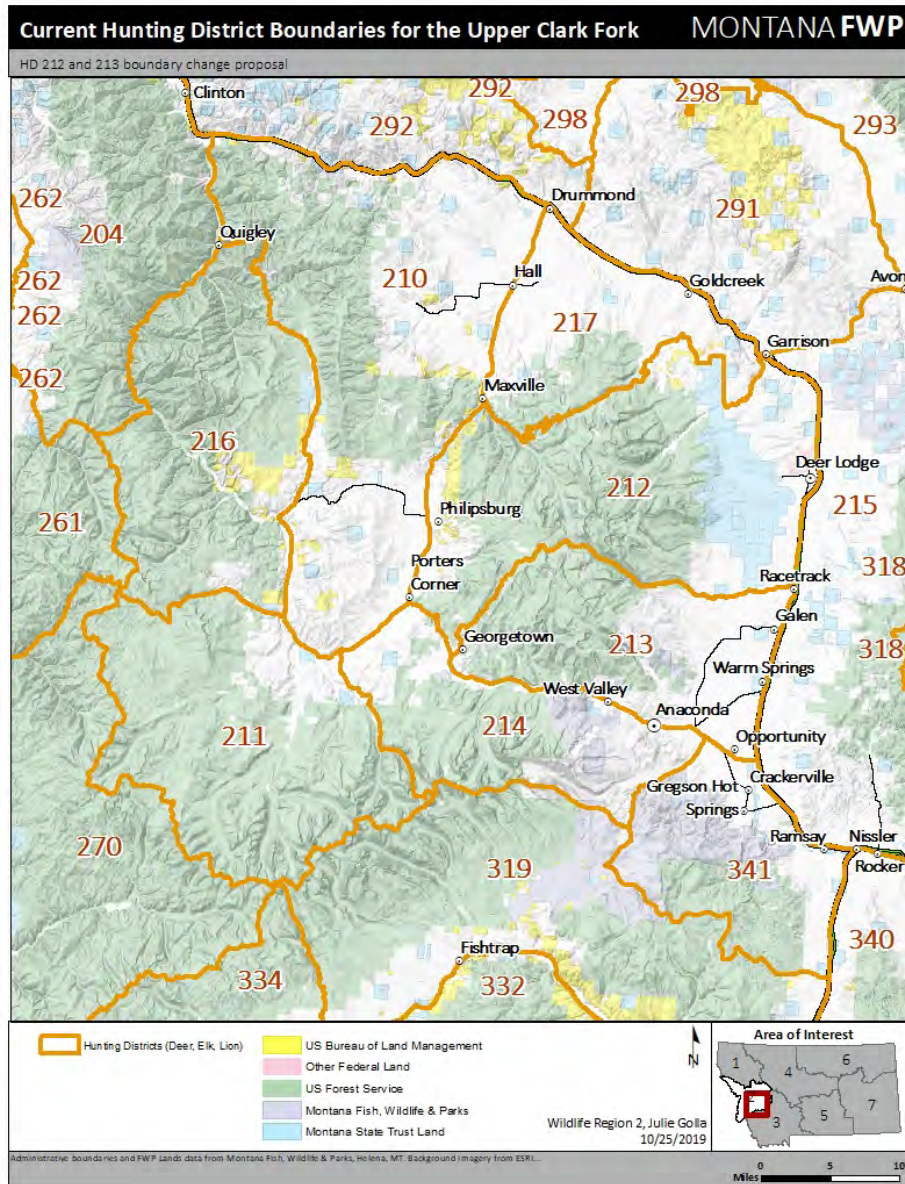


Figure 2. Current hunting district boundaries in the Upper Clark Fork.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

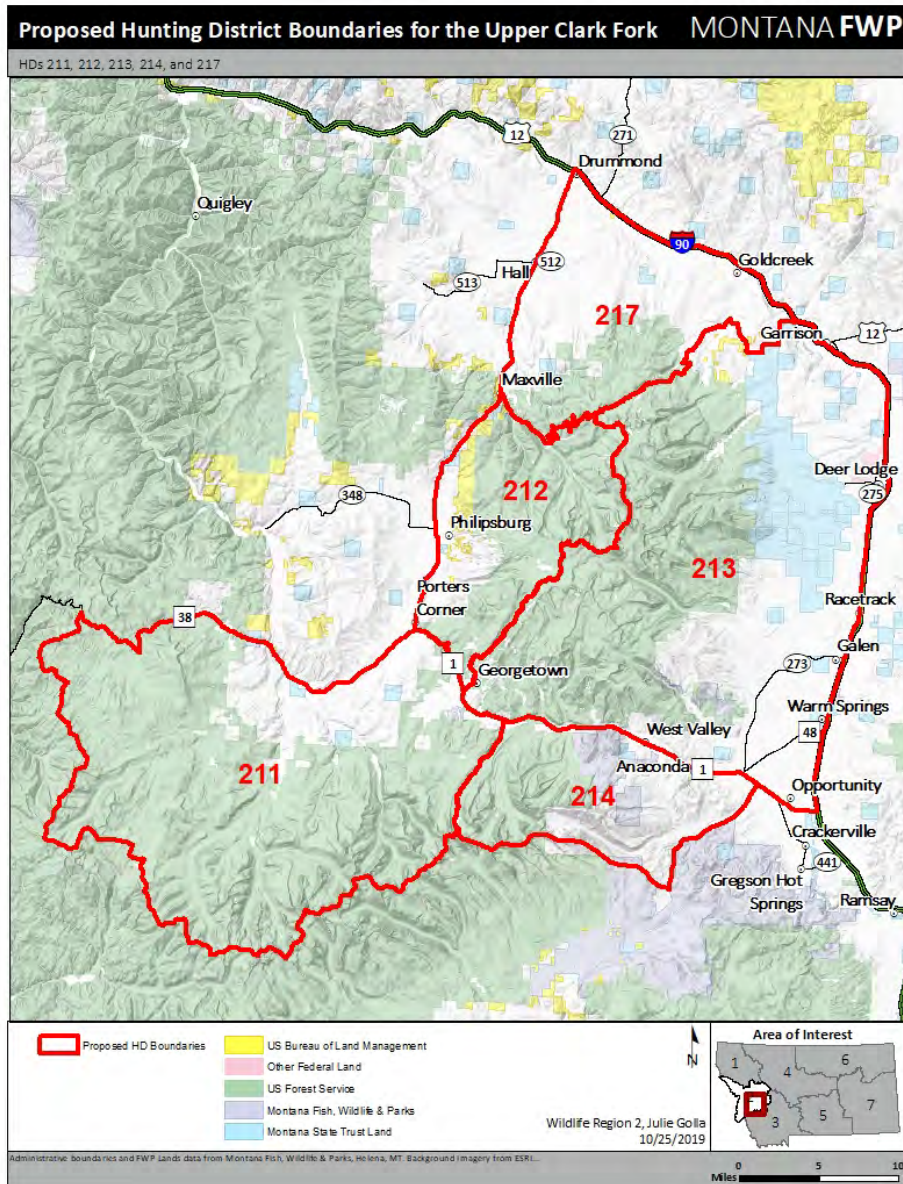


Figure 3. All proposed hunting district boundary changes for 2020 in the Upper Clark Fork. Note the 212 and 213 change along the Flint Creek Mountains divide.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

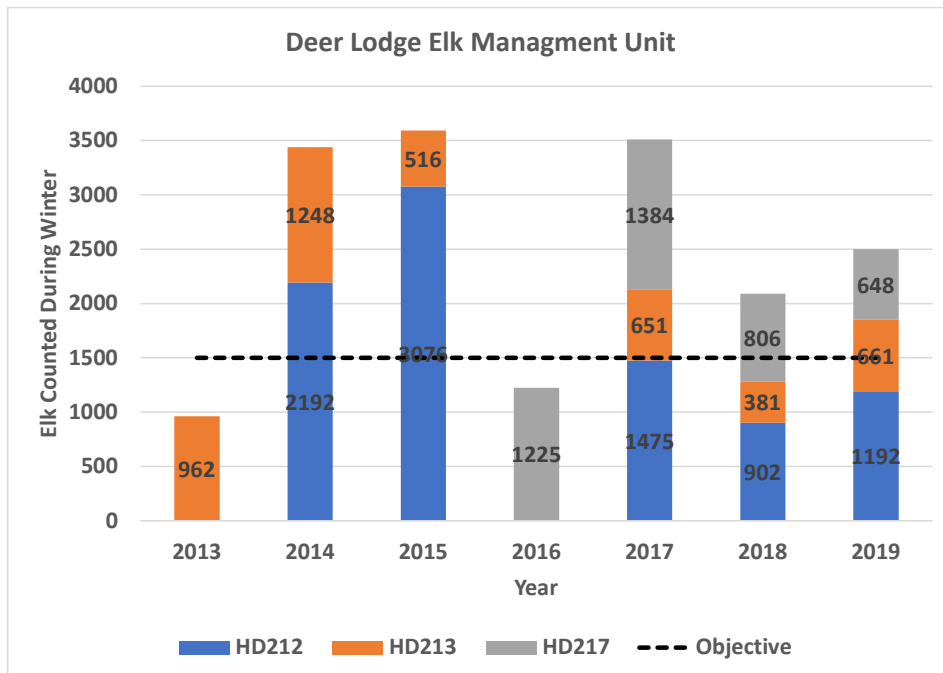


Figure 4. Total elk population numbers from the Deer Lodge elk management unit. Winter elk counts vary between the current HD 212 and HD 213 due to large groups of elk moving across the Racetrack Creek boundary (2014-2015).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The proposed boundary change will help include the private lands of the Deer Lodge valley into one hunting district for simplified wildlife management and game damage mitigation efforts. The Philipsburg Valley has mostly public land until you reach the other boundary of State Route 1.

Weather is similar throughout the area of these hunting districts

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

Local landowners and sportsmen support the change in the Racetrack Creek boundary, as it has been a point of frustration with the increased private land hunting access and participation in the Deer Lodge valley. The Prison Ranch will have the same hunting opportunities as it did in HD 212, only a change in hunting district classification will occur for the overall elk management of the new HD 213.

Landowners support the continuation of late shoulder seasons and private lands permits or B licenses to provide an efficient tool to harvest and disperse private lands elk in the region. Landowners do not support ending the permit and B license hunting with general rifle season and would prefer an established late season to February 15 for private lands only.

Sportsmen are split in support when it comes to shoulder seasons. Some see it ethically wrong to hunt elk for 6 months, or during hard winters when they are stressed from weather and prolonged hunting. Other sportsmen actively participate in late season private lands hunt and see it as a way to harvest an elk when physical or weather constraints make harvesting elk in the general season difficult.

Submitted by: Julie Golla

Date: November 20, 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk
Region: 2
Hunting District: 214

Year: 2020

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

It is proposed to

- Replacing a general license opportunity for brow-tined-bull to a limited permit 214-45 to hunting district HD 214.

Currently, there is an unlimited opportunity to harvest a bull on the general elk license for archery and rifle seasons in HD 214.

*Note, please consider this proposal with the HD 214 boundary change.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

Objectives are:

- Reduce bull harvest to improve bull to cow ratios in HD 214
- Improve hunter satisfaction

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

The success of this proposal will be measured by:

- Reduced harvest will be measured by annual hunter survey harvest estimates
- Improved bull to cow ratios will be measured during annual winter elk surveys
- Satisfaction with sportsmen hunting in HD 214 will be measured at the hunter check station and from FWP staff receiving input from local sportsmen.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

Elk population counts (Figure 1) during winter surveys the last two years have been below objective and the bull/100 cow ratio (Figure 3) below 10, which is considered too low based on the 2005 elk management plan for this hunting district. Harvest (Figure 2) was estimated as much higher in 2017 for bulls, while 2018 had a more typical harvest.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

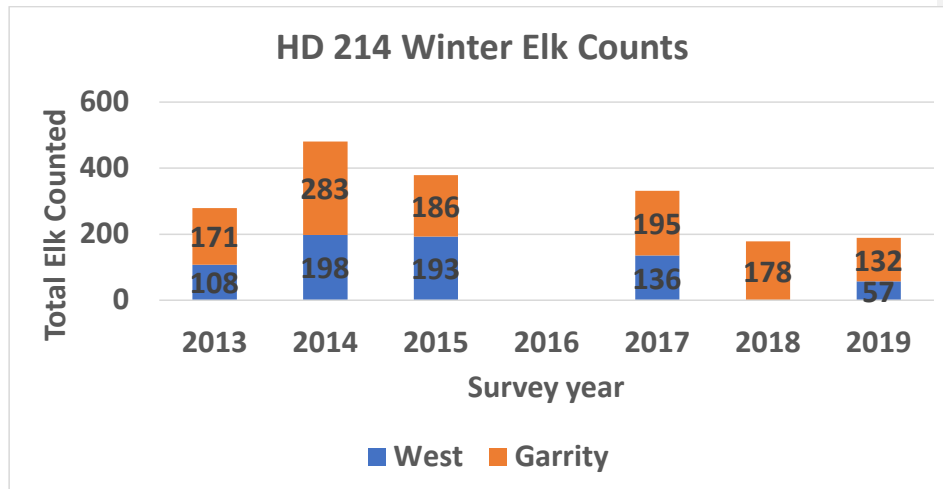


Figure 1. Elk counts from winter surveys (January-March). West represents elk counted west of Silver Lake, Garrity represents elk on the east end of HD 214, typically on the Garrity Wildlife Management area.

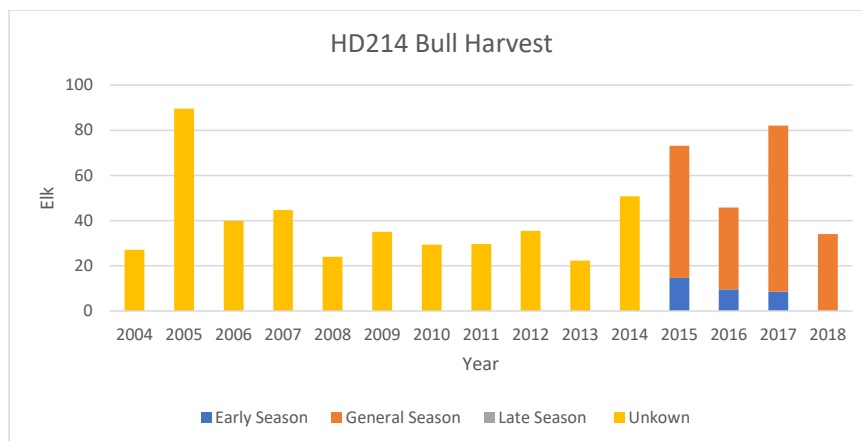


Figure 2. Bull harvest estimates from annual hunter surveys. Early season represents archery season harvest.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

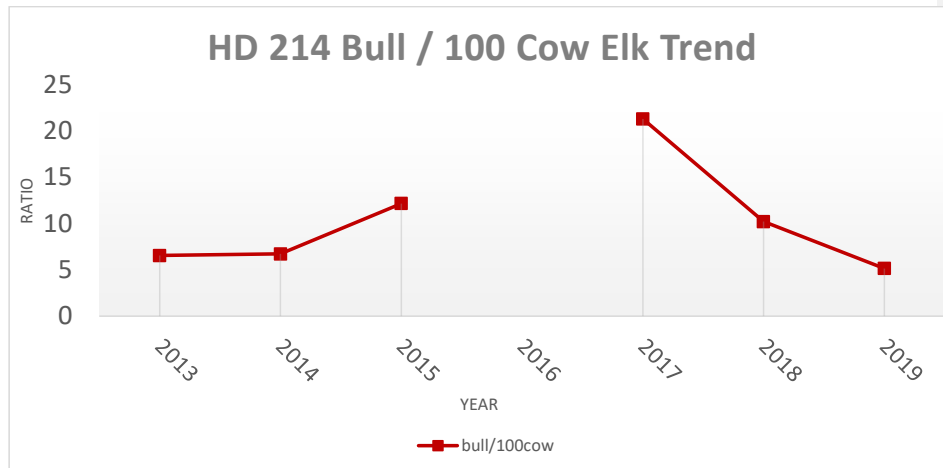


Figure 3. Bull per 100 cows ratios from winter surveys (January – March).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The local biologist interprets these low counts as partially a symptom of deep snow in areas that elk otherwise would be wintering, forcing migratory elk to winter elsewhere and outside the 214 area. HD 214 has a mix of year-round resident elk and migratory elk herds, where much of the elk population from summer and fall will winter in other hunting districts along the Pintler Mountains. South facing slopes are typically better winter range for elk, of which HD 214 has much less than the adjacent districts in Region 3.

Bull harvest estimates (Figure 2) are often correlated with weather during the general rifle season. Snow events help concentrate elk and push them down in elevation making them more accessible for hunters. Hunter effort also varies depending on favorable (some snow present) or poor (little to no snow) weather conditions for hunting. Year 2017 had snow on several occasions, while 2016 and 2018 had very little snow in comparison during the 5 week general rifle season.

The relatively small number of elk that occupy HD 214 can show large variations in annual survey results depending on the variables described above. Conservative management is an assured way to manage population numbers and healthy herd demographics when data suggests changes moving away from management objectives.

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal is supported by members of the local Anaconda Sportsmen's Club. There is disagreement among club members and local sportsmen not associated with the club. People enjoy being able to hunt HD 214 on their general license opportunity. Local landowners have not provided much input on this proposal.

Submitted by: Julie Golla

Date: November 14, 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk

Region: 2

Hunting District: 215

Year: 2020

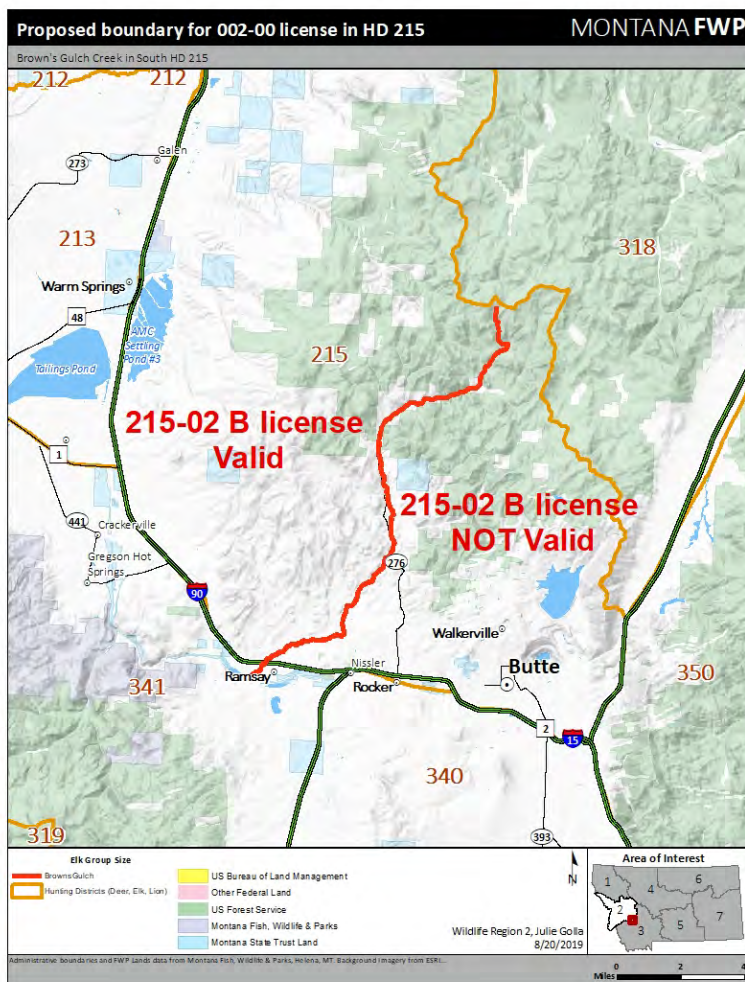
1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

It is proposed to

- Remove the antlerless opportunity and only allow brow-tined bull opportunity on the general elk license (no changes to Youth or PTHFV hunting on general license).
- Add 250 (range 5-500) 215-01 antlerless permits valid district-wide for archery and general season. Holders can not hunt antlered elk in HD 215
- Add 400 (range 5-800) 215-02 antlerless elk B licenses valid from August 15-end of general rifle season.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

- o August 15 – Day before general rifle season:
Only valid on private lands and NOT valid east of Browns Gulch Creek (Figure 1).
- o General rifle season:
Only valid on private lands AND ALSO VALID on DNRC lands outside National Forest Boundary. NOT valid east of Browns Gulch Creek (Figure 1).



2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Figure 1. Proposed boundary for 215-02 B license opportunity. Brown's Gulch Creek is highlighted in red and would be the feature that the license is only valid west of in HD 215.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Objectives are to:

- Slow the antlerless elk harvest rate as HD 215 continues to approach population objective.
- Relieve hunting pressure on the smaller elk herd near Brown's Gulch.
- Address game damage and private lands elk management challenges.
- Maintain landowner and hunter satisfaction.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be measured by:

- Harvest will be measured by annual hunter survey harvest estimates.
- Elk populations will be measured during annual winter surveys.
- Satisfaction with sportsmen will be measured from FWP game wardens, block management, and biologists receiving input from local sportsmen.
- Game damage will be measured by FWP staff and the game damage database.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Elk population counts (Figure 2) show a decline in elk numbers in HD 215. This trend is approaching the population objective of 1,400 ($\pm 20\%$) elk. Late, heavy snows in February 2019 seemed to have trapped several hundred migratory elk in HD 335, showing a steeper decline in population in HD 215 than is likely accurate (Figure 3). The severe winter also lowered calf survival, which will act additively to population decline with fewer recruited breeding adults in the next 2 years.

Antlerless elk harvest declined in the hunting season of 2018 (Figure 4). This is to be expected as fewer elk are on the landscape to harvest each year the population declines. Antlerless harvest during the general season remained unchanged with the introduction of the antlerless opportunity on the general license. The decline in antlerless harvest is represented in the late and early shoulder season with the 002-00 B license. By replacing

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

the region-wide 002-00 B license with 400 district specific B licenses, private lands elk in HD 215 will continue to be managed but with more control than the unlimited 002-00 B license of 2018-2019 provided.

FWP staff observed an unusually high density of hunters in HD 215 during the 2018 hunting season. The shoulder season opportunity, along with the general license opportunity for antlerless elk, may have attracted additional hunters outside the region such as Kalispell, Helena, and Bozeman. However, if hunters had not previously hunted the area or did not have private lands access, they did not increase harvest, only decreased hunter success estimates.

Following current harvest trends and averages from antlerless hunting permits and licenses in 2016-2018, it is expected that HD 215 will be within objective after two more hunting seasons. If late season harvest is removed, this may be delayed by one or more hunting seasons.

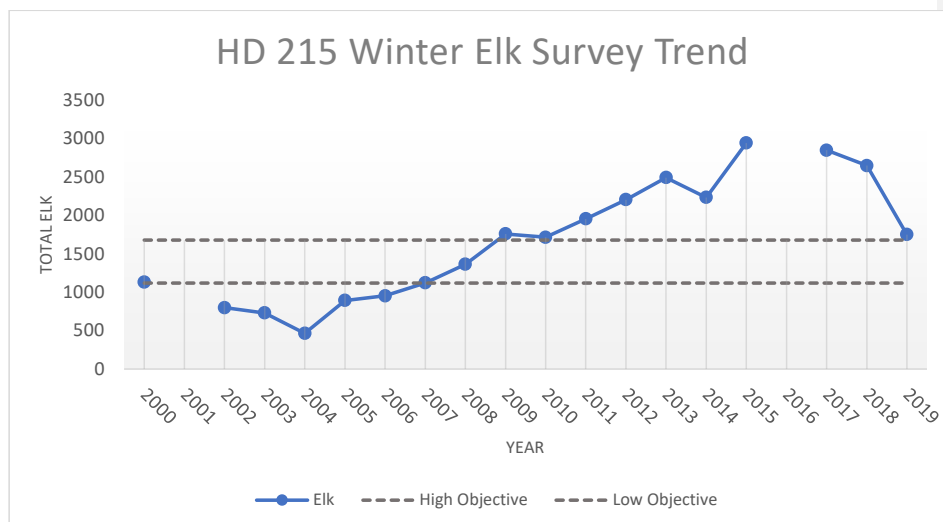


Figure 2. Elk counts from winter surveys (January-March). B licenses and shoulder seasons began in 2016. Unlimited 002-00 B licenses began in 2018 (general rifle season prior to 2019 winter survey). Antlerless opportunity on the general elk license also began in 2018.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

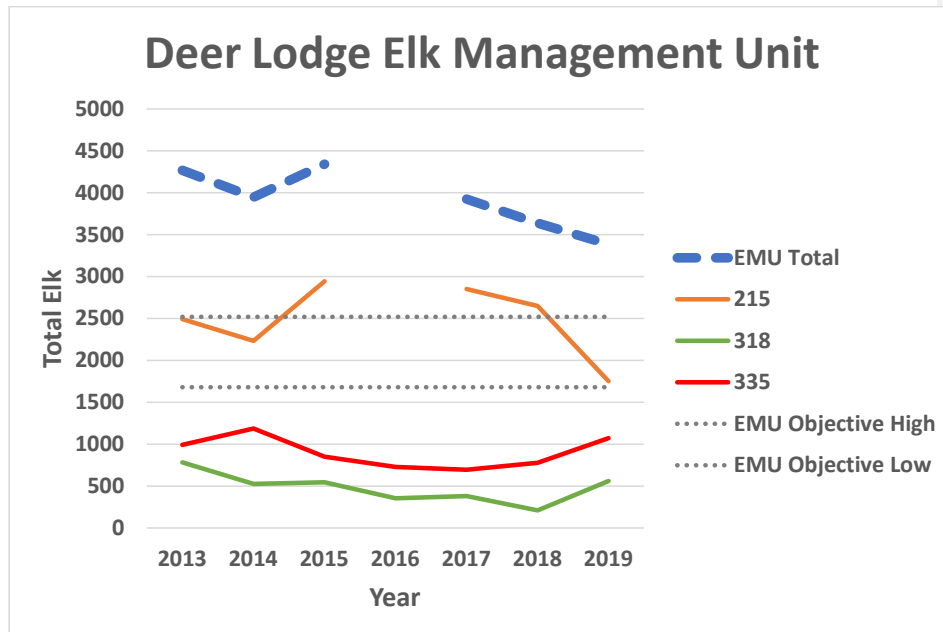


Figure 3. Deer Lodge Elk Management Unit combined numbers. Population data is from winter elk surveys.

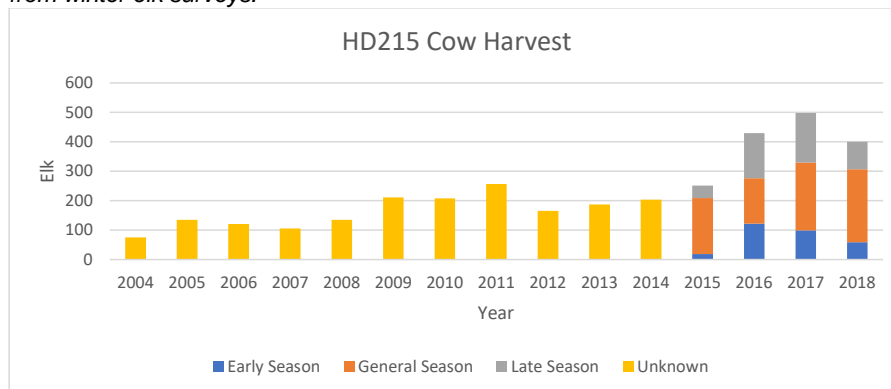


Figure 4. Estimated cow harvest reported from annual hunter surveys. Early season represents shoulder season harvest starting August 15 and archery season harvest. Late season represents harvest after general rifle until February 15.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Two heavy-snow winters in a row have varied the hunting success in HD 215. There was little to no snow during the late shoulder season of December 2018 - February 15 2019, resulting in few elk being accessible on private lands once hunting on public lands ended with general rifle season. This is one variable that may explain the decrease in antlerless harvest.

After a very mild January through November, abrupt heavy snow in February 2019 may have trapped some elk that had not yet been pushed to wintering grounds. With an increase in elk counted in HD 318 and 335, it is possible that these elk would typically be counted in HD 215, thus showing an exaggerated population decline in one HD, but not overall for the Deer Lodge elk management unit.

Brown's Gulch only holds a small percentage of HD 215's elk during winter surveys, around 200 on average. Shoulder seasons have disrupted elk movement, which could be one of the variables making hunting more difficult in this popular hunting area. The close accessibility of this area for Butte sportsmen may also increase hunting effort in this area, increasing harvest and pressure on elk.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Many sportsmen who have spent years hunting in the Brown's Gulch area have reached out to FWP staff to express concern over the difficulty of finding elk in hunting seasons 2017 and 2018. They support the removal of the antlerless elk opportunity from the general license and have encouraged limiting access of the unlimited 002-00 B license east of Brown's Gulch Creek (Figure 1). The limited 215-02 B license for private land is proposed for the 2020-2022 biennium, which will also help reduce overall pressure in HD 215 and Brown's Gulch.

Landowners are not in support of removing the B-license access east of Brown's Gulch Creek. Ranchers that still incur game damage from small groups of elk can efficiently disperse them off private property with the private land B licenses. FWP will likely have to set up game damage hunts for these landowners upon approval of this proposal.

There is landowner support to keep the 002-00 B license, or another B license, and shoulder season hunts for the next two years. Sportsmen are one of two camps: 1) They either enjoy the opportunity to harvest a second elk, or just an antlerless elk, or 2) They are concerned with the hunting pressure that has increased since 2016, changing elk numbers, distribution, and crowding popular hunting areas (e.g. Spotted Dog WMA and Brown's Gulch) with vehicles and hunters.

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

Submitted by: Julie Golla

Date: November 15, 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk

Region: 2

Hunting District: HD 217

Year: 2020

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

It is proposed to:

- Replace 002-00 B license with 400 217-02 private lands only B license (range 5-500)

*Note: Please consider with HD 217 boundary change.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

Objectives are:

- Provide a private lands tool to manage elk and game damage on private lands in HD 217
- Maintain satisfaction with sportsmen and landowners
- Manage elk populations towards objective

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

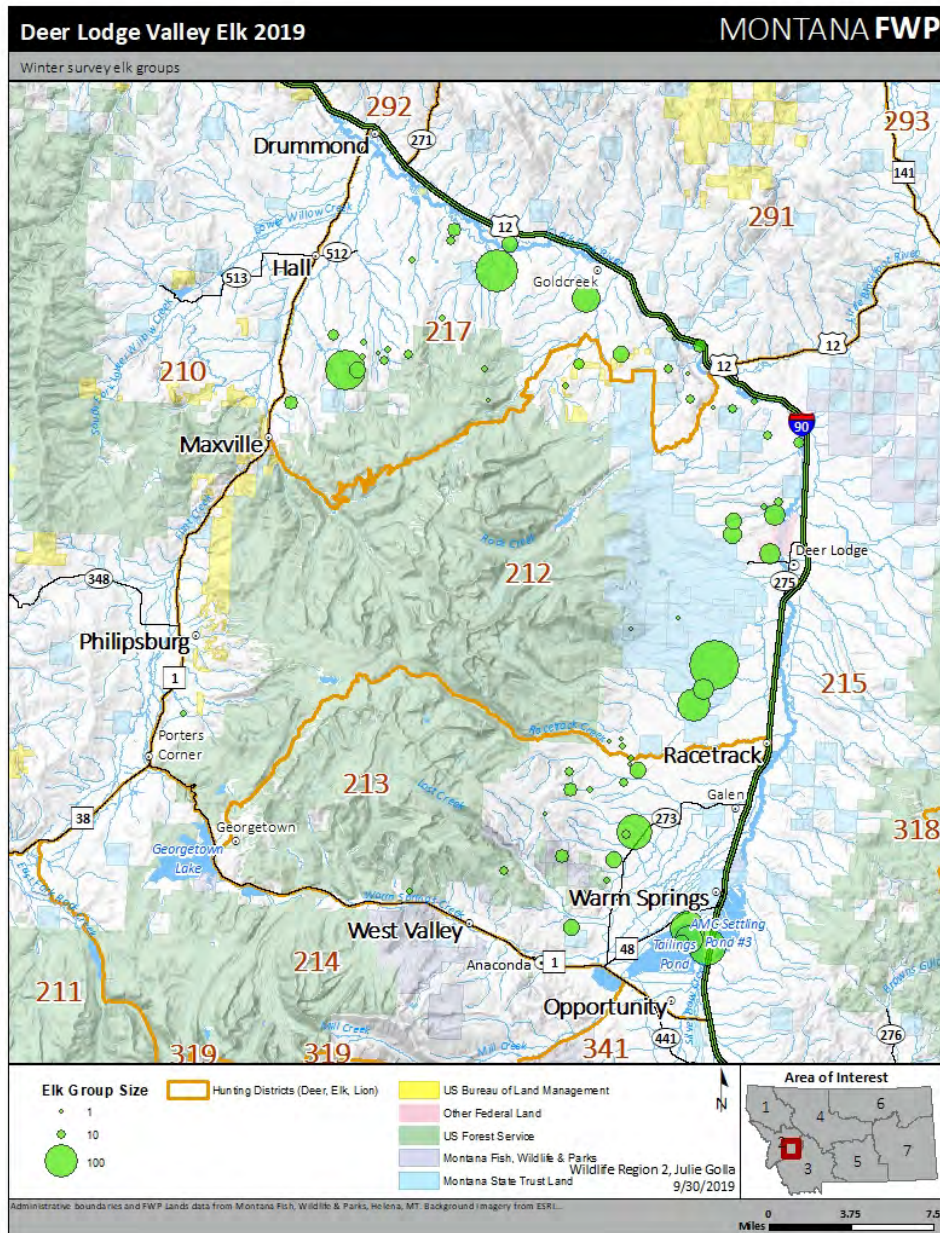
The success of this proposal will be measured by:

- Annual winter elk surveys will measure elk populations
- Annual hunter surveys will measure hunter harvest estimates
- Game damage will be measured by FWP field staff working with landowners

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The following map displays elk distribution on winter range of March 2019. Elk are approaching objective in HD 217, and are projected to be within or below objective after hunting season in 2020-2021 (figure 3). The Deer Lodge elk management unit (figure 2) is over objective.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications



2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Figure 1. Elk distribution and group size in March 2019 during winter elk surveys.

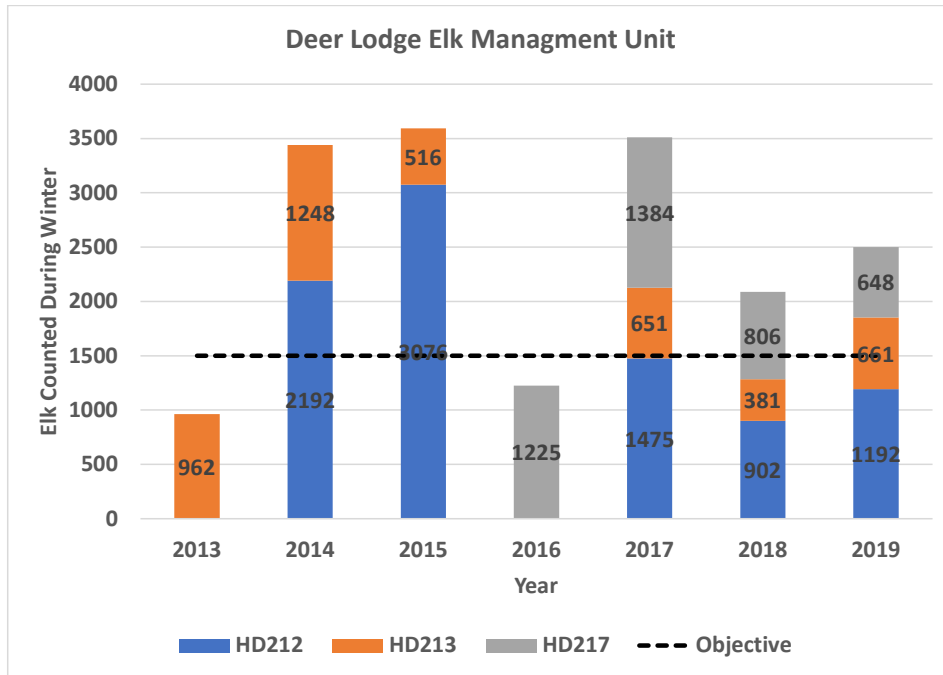


Figure 2. Elk population trends for the Deer Lodge elk management unit.

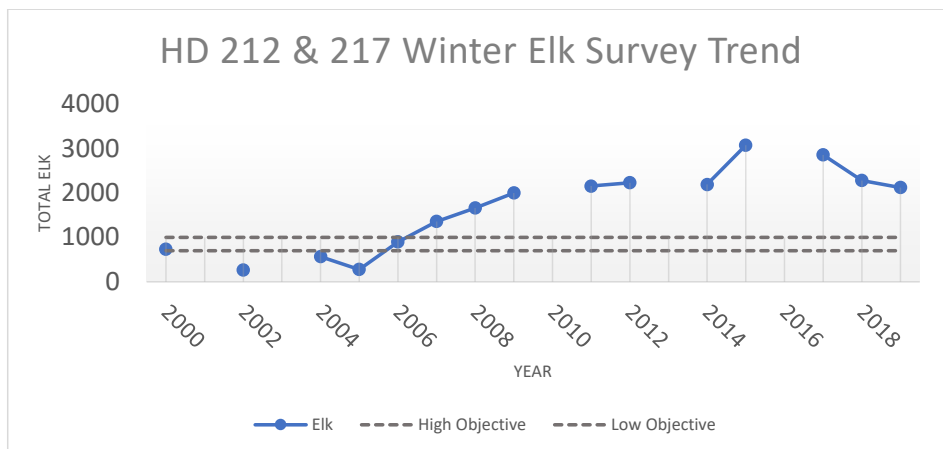


Figure 3. Elk movement between HD 212 and HD 217 often creates high variation between the two districts' independent population objectives. Also, HD 217 was created in

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

2016, with fewer years to display long term population trends. Viewing the two districts' population data together shows a more complete story on current populations in the area.

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Private land hunting access is readily available in HD 217 with Block Management Areas and other cooperating landowners throughout the region. Large congregations of elk on the Angelo Ranch have been dispersed into smaller elk groups and overall numbers have declined on private lands.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Landowners in HD 217 are in strong support of having a private lands elk management tool such as the 002-00 B license implemented in 2018-2019. They do not support removing these B licenses, so adding the district specific 217-02 B license will provide a controlled pool of hunters for landowners to work with in harvesting and dispersing private land elk.

Landowners also support having a late shoulder season hunt with private land B licenses, which this proposal does not include.

Sportsmen are split in support when it comes to shoulder seasons. Some see it ethically wrong to hunt elk for 6 months, or during hard winters when they are stressed from weather and prolonged hunting. Other sportsmen actively participate in late season private lands hunt and see it as a way to harvest an elk when physical or weather constraints make harvesting elk in the general season difficult.

Submitted by: Julie Golla

Date: November 20, 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 2

Hunting District: 240

Year: 2020

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Change the existing antlerless permit (240-01) into a B-license, valid for archery season, general season, and a late shoulder season (end of general – January 15—NOTE this is a shorter season than the antlerless permit originally allowed). Private land only during the late season.

Regulations in HD240 have varied widely over the years because of the numerous complexities of this HD. Antlerless elk opportunity has existed by B-license before, but was changed to an antlerless permit in 2018 because we thought doing so might reduce bull harvest (as holders of the permit could not hunt an antlered bull in HD240).

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of this proposal is to simplify the existing tool used for maintaining the elk population at objective and allowing late harvest when game damage problems are widespread and numerous.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of the proposal will be measured through harvest via the annual hunter phone survey and, to a small degree, the Darby Check Station (which captures harvest from the southern end of the district). We will also continue monitoring the elk population during spring aerial surveys.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The elk population in HD240 hovers around objective (1,000 elk), with periodic dips or jumps above or below most likely based on elk movements during the spring survey (elk periodically move across Lolo Creek or the Bitterroot River into other HDs; see Figure 1). The most recent population count was 1,010, with 20 calves: 100 cows (average 28 calves: 100 cows over the past 10 years). Game damage is a significant problem in this area, resulting in a high number of kill permits and game damage hunts in the winter season. Collectively, this suggests the population objective may in fact be too high for social tolerance and/or habitat carrying capacity in this area. We hope that legal hunter harvest through the new proposed management tools will prevent game damage complaints before the winter, and/or give landowners a tool to manage problems during the winter.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

HD240 is generally not considered prime elk habitat, compared to habitat across the Bitterroot Valley in the Sapphire Mountains. Not only has most of the HD240 winter range been converted into residences or agriculture, but summer range is of more marginal quality, with dense lodgepole pine stands, rugged terrain, and lower abundance of meadows providing high-quality forage (compared to the Sapphires, which are more rolling, contain more Ponderosa pine savanna, and great expanses of meadows and forest edges). Habitat security during the winter comes in the form of tolerant landowners who harbor elk. The Lolo Peak Fire of 2017 burned a significant acreage in this district, which should (hopefully) boost habitat quality and draw elk off private lands in this area. However, because of this suite of issues, we are concerned about

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

the potential for overharvest of this elk herd similar to what occurred in the West Fork in 2004-2005, and therefore want to provide some limitations to antlerless harvest (versus allowing the regional 002 license).

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

An earlier proposal, which was to create this B-license and have it be valid for only the southern portion of HD240, was supported by the RCFWA; however, discussions with the two area game wardens prompted us to revise the proposal to completely replace the existing antlerless permit (valid south of Mormon Creek) with a B-license to simplify the regulation (many landowners were frustrated that the antlerless permit—which they may or may not draw—restricted them from being able to hunt in neighboring HDs with a significantly higher elk population, where permits are required).

Submitted by: Rebecca Mowry

Date: October 28, 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 2

Hunting District: 260

Year: 2020

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Remove the existing 260-00 (limited special weapon, long-season B-license) and replace it with the regionwide 002 license, valid for special weapons on private land only.

HD260 is historically an archery-only HD, however archery has been unable to curb increasing elk populations and game damage issues. In 2018, the 260-00 license was created for the Bitterroot portion of the district and was not effective (of 50 licenses issued, only 4 elk were harvested), likely due to access issues on private land. The regionwide 002 license was valid in the northern portion of HD260 (west of Highway 93 in Missoula County) beginning in 2018; this proposal merely extends that regulation to the rest of HD260, where the increased availability of licenses may result in increased elk harvest.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objectives of this proposal are to a) simplify hunting regulations, b) reduce the elk population in the Bitterroot portion of HD260, and c) reduce game damage caused by elk on private land. Ideally, more elk will be driven out of the riverbottom back into neighboring HDs.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

The success of the proposal will be measured through the annual hunter harvest phone survey as well as reduced game damage complaints.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The population objective of HD260 is 50 elk. There are three elk herds that spend all or most of the year in the Bitterroot portion of HD260: the Florence herd (about 100 elk, which split their time between HD260 and HD204), the Stevensville herd (about 80 elk, primarily in the riverbottom) and the Hamilton herd (about 80 elk, also primarily in the riverbottom but occasionally venturing into HDs 270 and 240). Elk have likely always inhabited the riverbottom but in low enough densities that crop damage was minimal; over the last decade, however, these herds have grown substantially, and/or have been supplemented by more elk moving down from neighboring HDs. In Missoula County, up to 100 elk move down from neighboring HDs throughout the year (primarily 203) and cause extensive damage to cropland west of Missoula.

Weapons restrictions and extremely fragmented habitat make elk harvest in this HD difficult; the riverbottom is highly developed, and any land that is not farmed has been subdivided into housing developments with only a few pockets of larger, undeveloped riparian habitat remaining. Elk harvest is low, averaging 11 antlerless elk between 2012-2017. (Antlerless harvest was considerably higher—57 cows—in 2018 because of the addition of the 002 license which was valid using special weapons in Missoula County. The 002 was valid with archery-only in the Bitterroot during this time, and while both archery and gun harvest increased in 2018, unfortunately the harvest data is collected in such a way that it is impossible to differentiate harvest between the Missoula and Bitterroot portions of the HD. However, we believe the majority of the female harvest came from the Missoula portion.)

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

HD260 is primarily private land with a few DNRC sections and the larger Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge (LMNWR). Public hunting opportunities are scarce; elk hunting is not permitted on the LMNWR and state sections tend to be land-locked by private land, though some hunters find success floating between state sections on the Bitterroot River or hunting at Fishing Access Sites. Harsh winters exacerbate problems with these elk, as they get bolder in their search for food and push livestock off feed lines, hit unprotected haystacks, and occasionally eat landscape plants in housing developments; in addition, harsh winters may drive even more elk into the HD from surrounding areas.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal is supported by the RCFWA and a “working group” of landowners and hunters that have been meeting regularly from the Stevensville area (including parts of HDs 204, 240, 260, and 261). Our chief concern with this proposal was from the Montana Bowhunters Association which generally disagrees with any regulation that adds guns in HD260; however, their representative was amenable to this proposed change, since private landowners will still have control over weapons restrictions on their property, leaving plenty of archery-only opportunity while allowing special weapons where elk densities are especially problematic.

Submitted by: Rebecca Mowry

Date: October 28, 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk
Region: 2
Hunting District: 270

Year: 2020

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Add the 002 private land B-license to the southern portion of HD270 (East Fork portion). This would make the 002 license valid on private land in the entire HD.

Currently, antlerless harvest in the southern portion of HD270 is by limited B-license (270-02). General license antlerless opportunity is only available during archery season. Antlerless harvest in this portion has long been regulated by limited B-license, primarily due to enforcement problems and shoot-out situations in French Basin, an area of high elk concentrations and good access for hunters.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of this proposal is to increase elk harvest in the southern portion of HD270 and address problematic concentrations of elk on private land. It also will simplify hunting regulations for this HD.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

The success of the proposal will be measured through harvest via the annual hunter phone survey and the Darby Check Station. We will also be coordinating with law enforcement to make sure this change is not excessively problematic in French Basin.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The population objective for elk in HD270 is 3,800 elk. The most recent survey yielded 4,069 elk, which is within the 20% margin around the objective. A large proportion of this herd frequently winters in and around French Basin. Many of these elk migrate into the area from neighboring HD334, typically with inclement winter weather mid-rifle season.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

In HD334, recent elk surveys yielded the highest counts ever recorded, prompting the Butte-area biologist to propose increasing harvest opportunity for antlerless elk. Due to the migratory nature of these elk, balancing this increased opportunity with that in HD270 is warranted. HD334 does not have a population objective, but increases here are likely to be mirrored in HD270's spring population counts. Additionally, years of low calf:cow ratios in HD270 suggest that they may be nearing, if not exceeding, the carrying capacity of their winter range. Current antlerless harvest is minimal and not enough to have any impact on the growth of this population.

Allowing the 002 B-license to be valid here should result in an increase in antlerless harvest, but not so much as to be unsustainable. As it is private-land only, we anticipate that this license will be used mostly in areas of problematic elk concentrations that are or could potentially cause game damage.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

One major concern, and the reason we did not propose this 002 license for this portion when the license was first introduced in 2018, is the Lazy J Cross BMA. This is a large BMA that receives heavy hunter pressure and contains one of the key wintering areas for elk in French Basin, and because it is private land, the 002 license will be valid here. However, since the 002 license will now be limited instead of over-the-counter, the game wardens and biologists are more comfortable allowing its use in this area.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal is supported by the RCFWA since the 002 will now be limited; they would not support if the 002 remained over the counter. Their main concern lies with Lazy J Cross in French Basin.

Game wardens were supportive, citing the fact that they always have enforcement issues and occasional shoot-outs in French Basin warranting their continued presence there, and this 002 license should only marginally contribute to that.

Submitted by: Rebecca Mowry
Date: October 28, 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk
Region: 2
Hunting District: 283
Year: 2020-2021

1. Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

- A. Eliminate 283-02 Elk B-license.
- B. Eliminate 283-10 Elk Permit.
- C. Remove Youth and PTHFV opportunity to harvest antlerless elk on general license.

Historically, antlerless elk harvest was challenging to accomplish on the west end of HD 283 because many elk migrated to private property after the general hunting season. Also, some properties were closed to hunting, which aggravated game damage issues.

Due to a growing elk population and lack of opportunity for harvest during the general season, FWP instituted late season game damage hunts on private lands in 2002, and an early elk backcountry rifle season in the Rattlesnake Wilderness and

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Recreation Area starting in 2006, including limited permits for BTB/Antlerless elk (283-10) and limited antlerless permits/licenses (most recently 283-02). There have been 5 BTB/Antlerless elk permits issued each year. FWP has been phasing out the antlerless B-license since 2018. Below is the history of permits and licenses for the early backcountry rifle season on antlerless elk in the Rattlesnake:

2006 - 2009: 283-02: 75 antlerless permits

2010 - 2012: 283-82: 75 B-licenses

2013 – 2017:283-02: 40 B-licenses

2018:283-02: 5 B-licenses

2019:283-02: 1 B-license

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? (This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.)**

The objective of this proposal is to reduce the harvest of antlerless elk and bring the population back within objective.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? (This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.)**

MFWP personnel will measure success of the proposed changes by annually monitoring hunter harvest survey data, as well as spring aerial survey data, including total elk numbers, calf:cow ratios, distribution of elk, and percentage of bulls.

This proposal will be successful if we see the elk population grow back to within objective.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Based upon 2019 spring survey data (146 observed elk), the population is now below population objective. The population objective is for 300 elk \pm 20% in the North Hills and Evaro elk herds. This population was over objective for 11 of the past 12 years, with 2018 being the first year the population was within objective since 2006 (see Fig. 1).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).

We have now had 3 years of 'harder' winters, and we have seen a decline in calf recruitment (Fig. 2). We had a particularly hard late winter in the Missoula valley this year. This spring we documented 16 calves:100 cows in the North Hills/Evaro herd and in 2018 we documented 18 calves:100 cows. Harvest (especially late season harvest) has been up the last several years but neither of these factors fully explain the decline we're seeing in this population over the past 2 years.

We did not detect a redistribution of elk in either the Mt Jumbo area (immediately to the east of the North Hills/Evaro herd) or the Mill Creek herd (on west side). Mt Jumbo elk were stable and the Mill Creek herd count was down 16% from the previous year. However, it's possible some of the North Hills elk herd redistributed elsewhere and possibly wintered on the Flathead reservation which is not surveyed by the CSKT.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This past May/June we made a special ask to the commission to remove the OTC B-license (002-00) from this district. We shared our monitoring data and proposal justification with Hellgate Hunters & Anglers in June and to the North Hills Elk Working Group in May. At that time, I also gave them a heads up that I was phasing out the early backcountry opportunity and would be proposing to remove this opportunity entirely during the 2020-21 season setting process. Although there was and will be some disappointment in discontinuing this popular backcountry opportunity, most people I've talked to understand that it is unreasonable to continue this hunt when the

**2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range
Justifications**

population is below objective. I have also shared spring survey information and the 002-00 June proposal info with all North Hills landowners that participated in the coordinated late shoulder hunt, and with adjacent landowners. All understand that I am proposing to further reduce elk hunting opportunity in 283. I have not yet vetted the proposal to remove the youth and PTHFV opportunity but will do so during public process this winter.

Submitted by: Liz Bradley, Wildlife Biologist

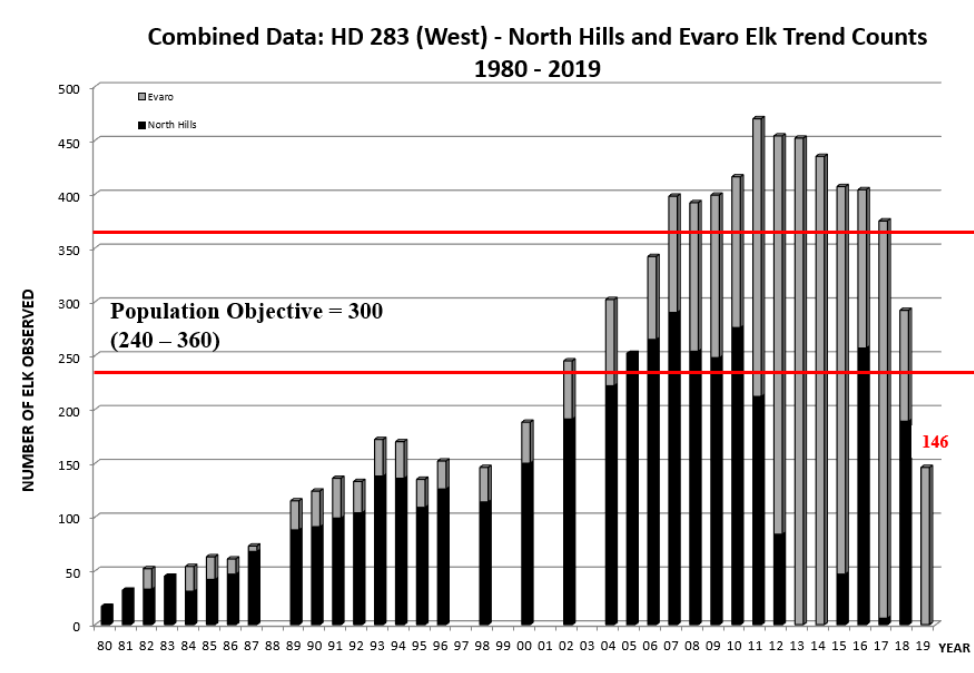
Date: 10/25/19

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved/Modified by: _____
Name / Date

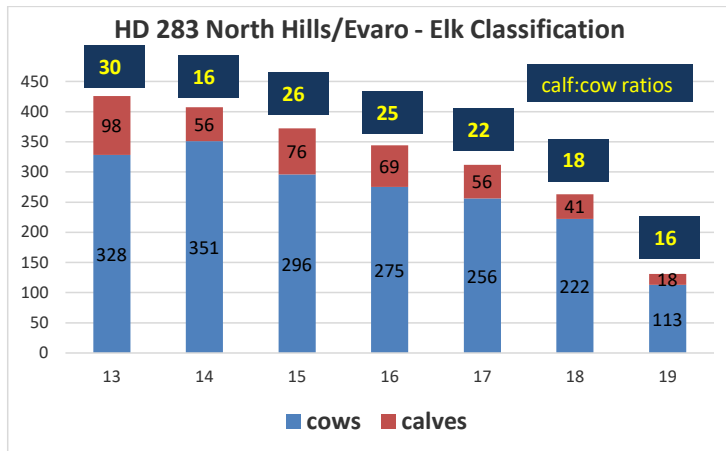
2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Figure 1. North Hills and Evaro Elk Trend Counts 1980 – 2019.



2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Figure 2. Elk classification (cows & calves) and calf:cow ratios for observed elk in North Hills/Evaro herds from 2013-2019.



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting Districts: 300, 301, 302, 311, 312, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 340, 341, 343, 350, 360, 361, 362, 370, 390, 391, 392 (archery season only), 393

R3 HDs EXCLUDED from this proposal: 309 (ES on General); 310, 313, 392 (Youth/PTHFV Not offered during general rifle));

339, 380 (limited ES permit districts, Spike already offered on the General-license regulation, Youth/PTHFV = Spike/Antlerless); **388** (Helena Valley, no BTB allowed, Spike/Antlerless already offered on the General-license regulation)

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Year: 2020-2021

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Region 3 has a mess of different Youth and PTHFV opportunities across districts (see page 2, a regs page for the 2019 season). This proposed season change will standardize the Youth and PTHFV opportunity across Region 3 as much as possible to an Either-Sex opportunity, for both Youth and PTHFV, in both Archery and General Seasons.

2. **What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objectives are to: simplify this opportunity/regulation across the region and to provide additional opportunity for Spike Bulls to Youth and PTHFV, which would subsequently reduce violations incurred by youth hunters should they unintentionally shoot a spike bull.

3. **How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

A condensed list in the regulations!

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

In HD's where this opportunity is being offered, elk populations are assumed to be abundant enough to sustain additional harvest of antlerless elk by Youth/PTHFV.

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

N/A—This is a minor change across most districts.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Discussed by all R3 area biologists in early August 2019. We expect that it will be discussed with constituent groups this fall, as hunters start to convene their meetings again.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika

Date: 8/21/2019

Approved: _____

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

Youth (ages 12-15) or Hunters with a Permit to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV) Opportunities. See each individual hunting district for opportunity specific restrictions.						
HD	License or Permit	Opportunity	Apply by Date	Quota	Archery Only Dates	Season Dates
General Elk License Opportunities Continued						
270	General Elk License	Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV). Only valid north of Rye Creek.
270	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
280	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	- Only youth ages 12-15. Archery Only Season.
281	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Sep 15-Sep 25 Only youth ages 12-15.
283	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
285	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
291	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
292	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
293	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
300	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
302	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
301	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Nov 11-Dec 01 Hunters with a PTHFV.
301	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
311	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
316	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
314	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV). South of Big Creek.
318	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
319	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
321	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
328	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
329	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
331	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
332	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
334	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Hunters with a PTHFV.
334	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
335	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
341	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
343	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
339	General Elk License	Spike Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
380	General Elk License	Spike Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
340	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Nov 11-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
360	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
361	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Hunters with a PTHFV.
381	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
382	General Elk License	Either-sex Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15.
392	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
393	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
394	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
395	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
396	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
397	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
398	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
399	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).
400	General Elk License	Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Oct 26-Dec 01 Only youth ages 12-15 and those Permitted to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV).

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 301, 309, 311, 312, 390, and 393

Year: 2020-2021

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

HD 312, 390, and 393 are currently in a shoulder season regulation that allows antlerless elk harvest on the general license from the end of rifle season until February 15th, not valid on National Forest Land. These three hunting districts have an unlimited Elk B license, the 397-00, valid only on private land August 15th until opening of archery season, then not valid on National Forest Land through archery season, general rifle season, and until February 15th. The purpose of this shoulder season is to numerically reduce the elk numbers in these three areas which are all over population objective.

HD 311 is in a shoulder season regulation allowing antlerless elk harvest on the general license from the end of rifle season until February 15th, valid north of Highway 84 only. It has 1,000 dedicated 311-00 Elk B licenses not valid on National Forest Lands from archery season until the end of rifle season, and then valid only north of Highway 84 until February 15th. The shoulder season regulation in this district was created to manage the broad-scale distribution change of 1,500-2,000 elk which moved off traditional habitat south of Highway 84 onto the agricultural lands north of Highway 84 during winter causing broad-scale game damage and brucellosis risk.

HD 309 is the weapons restricted area around the Greater Bozeman Area. It was implemented for public safety to limit high-powered rifle hunting in developed, exurban areas. Wildlife management in this district focuses on conflict minimization. Since its development in 2005, it has allowed late-season elk hunting until January 15th, in part to allow longer time to hunt given hunting could be less fruitful using restricted weapons. The general license currently allows either-sex elk hunting through archery and rifle season and antlerless elk only until January 15th. There are 100 B licenses valid in both HD 309 and HD 301, the 395-00, not valid on National Forest Lands, which allow elk hunting until January 15th in HD 309 but only to the end of general season in HD 301.

HD 301 is a largely public land district where elk are not above objective, but elk do cause damage in the northwestern corner of the district. It is the only district in this grouping that does not allow late season hunting of any type. The general elk license allows for brow-tined bull or antlerless elk harvest through archery season and the first two weeks of rifle season, after which only brow-tined bull elk are allowed until the end of rifle seasons. The 395-00, the 100 B licenses shared with HD

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

309, allow antlerless elk harvest not valid on National Forest Lands, valid through archery and rifle seasons only.

The proposed regulation has three components:

- 1) It would allow the unlimited 397-00 B license to be used in districts 309, 311 (with restrictions), 312, 390, and 393. The 397-00 B license would be the only B license valid in HD 311 and HD 309; the 311-00 and the 395-00 will be removed. The regulations would read as follows:

Elk B License. Purchase beginning August 12.

397-00: Unlimited. One per hunter. Valid in HDs 309, 311 312, 390, and 393.

-Aug 15 - Sep 04 -Antlerless Elk. Only valid on private land. One per hunter. Valid in HDs 309, 311 (North of Highway 84 only), 312, 390, and 393.

-Sep 05 - Oct 18 -Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season. Not valid on National Forest Land. One per hunter. Valid in HDs 309, 311, 312, 390, 393.

-Oct 24 - Nov 29 -Antlerless Elk. Not valid on National Forest Land. One per hunter. Valid in HDs 309, 311, 312, 390, 393.

-Nov 30 - Feb 15 -Antlerless Elk. Not valid on National Forest Land. One per hunter. Valid in HDs 309, 311 (North of Highway 84 only), 312, 390, and 393.

- 2) General license antlerless elk hunting would extend through February 15th in HD 309 to maintain consistency with end dates among neighboring districts 312 and 311.
- 3) HD 301 will continue to allow 50 elk B licenses (quota range 25-150), valid on private land only, for the duration of the general rifle season only. There would be no proposed early nor late season hunting in HD 301. This 301-00 license would not be valid in HD 309.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The proposal involves three changes, each has dedicated specific objectives.

Proposed Change 1: Expanding the unlimited HD 397 license to include HD 311 and HD 309

Objective: Allow hunters greater freedom of movement across the landscape responding to access and elk availability in areas of problematic elk distributions or counts. Greater freedom for hunters is expected to result in greater efficiency of hunting as a tool in elk management across the area.

Under the current system, each hunter may only obtain 1 elk B license, and must choose among opportunities. Some B licenses may be more attractive to hunters as “package deals” (i.e., HD 397

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

allows 3 hunting districts) which leaves other B licenses under-subscribed. The dedicated HD 311 B license allowed up to 1000 to be sold, but just 207 people applied for this as a first choice in 2018. Many of the remainder, sold on surplus, may go to people lacking familiarity with HD 311 but who just wanted a B license. In most years the full 1,000 are never sold despite good harvest rates (see section 4 below). This is neither helpful nor effective for elk management in HD 311, where local hunters are more likely to be successful due to suddenly changing elk distribution, weather factors, and access.

HDs 309, 311, 312, 390, and 393 all need hunters to aid in elk management, whether to assist in numerical reduction or to help manage distribution challenges. Allowing a common B license and common end dates will help with elk management and will help with the ability of hunters to flow across the landscape. MFWP wants hunters from Bozeman, Belgrade, Manhattan, Three Forks, and surrounding communities to be able to hunt more freely across these adjacent districts.

Proposed Change 2: Extend general license antlerless hunting in HD 309 to February 15th

Objective: Simplicity in regulation for hunters and enforcement, greater ability to manage the exurban elk in HD 309.

Expanding the end date in HD 309 to February 15th may result in more elk harvest in this urban district, which could help defray game damage and prevent, or at least slow, the further establishment of urban elk. It would be simpler for hunters and enforcement by keeping common end dates across adjacent districts.

Proposed Change 3: HD 301 receives dedicated B license, valid on private land only

Objective: Focus harvest on the private lands where damage is occurring.

In HD 301, the current regulation allows for harvest on the substantial DNRC lands near Bear Canyon at the northeast edge of HD 301. This was an oversight when creating the license. Additional hunting harvest on DNRC lands does not help defray the damage and distribution challenges seen on the private lands to the northwest, and worse, could move elk off these public lands where they are desirable to the private lands in HD 309 where they can create damage situations. Changing this license to be valid on private land only will hopefully help direct hunters to the private lands where damage is occurring. Hunter access may be challenging in this area, and the proposed regulation would note this.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of all three proposed changes would be measured in several ways. Hunter harvest surveys will indicate the success of hunters with 397-00 and 301-00 B licenses. MFWP expects higher numbers of 397-00 B licenses will be sold if this proposal is successful, and that success rates

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

will also be higher because hunters holding this license will now have more land to hunt. Annual elk counts and classifications in all districts will continue to be used to address elk populations relative to objective. In combination with aerial surveys, landowner communications will indicate whether the hunting seasons are useful in managing elk damage. Hunter communications will help gauge whether they are successful in obtaining access and using these licenses.

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

HD 312 has met shoulder season performance criteria 2016-2018 (see report at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/seasons/elkShoulder/>) , but remains well above population objective with 1,199 elk counted in 2019 and a population objective of 600. The unlimited 397-00 B license and the shoulder season structure have been in place since 2016. During this time, 1,581-1,722 hunters received this B license and antlerless harvest in HD 390, HD 393, and HD 312 together has been 290, 355, and 211. Hunter success rates on the B license overall has been 18.4%, 21.9%, and 12.3%.

HD 301 and HD 309 are counted together, as elk winter range bridges these districts. The population objective range is to manage within 400 to 600 elk. The last 5 counts have all been within objective range indicating stability (average 548 elk, highest count 587, lowest count 503). However, with Bozeman continuing to expand and develop, winter range is being subdivided and lost and there is reason to believe this objective will eventually need to be adjusted downward. Elk are concentrating on the few agricultural fields remaining resulting in significant damage. The shared B license, the 395-00, has also been in place since 2016 and has seen 11, 7, and 10 antlerless elk harvested on the 100 licenses offered. This means generally less than a 10% hunter success rate on this license type. The elk harvested were split approximately equally between the two districts. In HD 301 an average of 5 antlerless were harvested each year. This proposal would move HD 301 B licenses from being "not valid on National Forest Land" to "valid on private land only" which removes ~9 mi² of DNRC land. The goal of this change is to direct B license harvest toward the private lands where damage problems occur. Given average harvest rate of about 5 antlerless per year on this license in HD 301, this proposal suggests 50 B licenses would balance the limited availability of hunting with hunter demand.

HD 311 has been a special case, as its dynamic has changed dramatically since the 2005 Elk Plan was written. The Elk Plan objective was to have 2,500 elk on the "north end of the Spanish Peaks" where this number of elk traditionally moved between the Spanish Peaks Wilderness and the Flying D Ranch, a large preserve of ~100,000 acres, all south of Highway 84. However, by 2009, elk distributions began to shift, and by 2014, >1,800 elk regularly left their traditional ranges, and moved north of Highway 84 onto scores of small agricultural lands and dairies that had not seen elk in generations. Meanwhile, an additional 200 elk grew into 1,000 elk on private lands in different portion of HD 311, generally unconnected to the Spanish Peaks herd, and not described in the Elk

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Plan. As this new herd rapidly increased in number, so did its spatial footprint, soon exceeding landowner tolerance on that side of HD 311 as well. The suddenness of the spatial changes, the magnitude of area affected (400mi²), the quantity of landowners effected (40-60) the extremely large elk herds (500-2,000), and the fact these elk hosted the *brucella* pathogen, all contributed to the worst conflicts the Bozeman biologist had ever seen or heard of.

HD 311 was placed in shoulder season in 2017, which was generally fruitful for hunters and helpful to landowners. An estimated 285 and 166 elk were harvested in these late seasons. The 311-00 B licenses showed comparable hunter success rates to other B licenses at 15.4% and 19.7% but were under-subscribed in both years. Although 1,000 licenses were available, only 249 and 785 were sold.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Habitat security, hunter access, and snow conditions are key issues in all areas, but perhaps especially in HD 311 where heavy snows move elk out of areas they are tolerated. In warmer or drier years, these elk will be more difficult to access whereas in snowier years they will be readily found. Having the combined 397-00 license would give hunters the flexibility to hunt across a greater landscape to pursue elk where access and availability allow.

In HD 301, farmers may allow hunting on their deeded ground, but may be leasing farmland from owners who do not allow hunting. A farmer could lose a substantial amount of his or her crop from elk damage and depredation but have little control over elk numbers. These lands could be small enough the landowner wants only family, friends, trusted hunters, or paying clients to hunt, and even then, perhaps with significant restrictions. The goal of the 301-specific B licenses is to allow these hunters, who may already have established places to hunt, the ability to help defray damage through additional hunting opportunities. By making the 397-00 more attractive to the general Gallatin Valley hunter, the 301-00 licenses may more easily find their way into the hands of hunters prepared to hunt only that small area.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal has been vetted through flight reports, harvest reports, and a dedicated e-mail to more than 200 parties representing different agencies, outfitters, landowners, sportsmen and sportswomen, and personnel within MFWP. It has specifically been discussed with several individuals with special interests in the area. Commenters in favor of the proposal appreciate that hunters could hunt additional districts using the 397-00 license, and internal MFWP staff often appreciate that this B license will have consistent regulation. Moving HD 309 elk season to end

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February 15th met with broadscale support, or at least no opposition, again noting the commonality of regulation was generally appreciated.

Some commenters voiced concern about HD 301. Concerns included seeing fewer licenses from last year, and what decoupling HD 301 from HD 309 would mean for the landowners who bridge both.

Although many sportspersons were clear they did not want to see a shoulder season in HD 301, some landowners did want a shoulder season. Some hunters worried if just 50 licenses were offered, they would have a harder time getting that license so they could harvest an elk in their usual spot in HD 301. Other sportsmen felt if too many licenses were offered, MFWP would be selling hunters a license they would not realistically be able to use. Some landowners felt portions of HD 301 should be included in HD 309 in order to gain a shoulder season. Others believe without rifles they would be less successful in harvesting elk, resulting in the opposite of intended effect despite the longer season. Another concern is moving the 301/309 boundaries without having full buy-in from every landowner in the area, because such a move would create a rule prohibiting rifle hunting whereas now it is the choice of the individual landowners. This could result in additional controversy. Some believe any redistricting of HD 309 should be socially driven for public safety, should derive from the landowners, and should be virtually unanimous.

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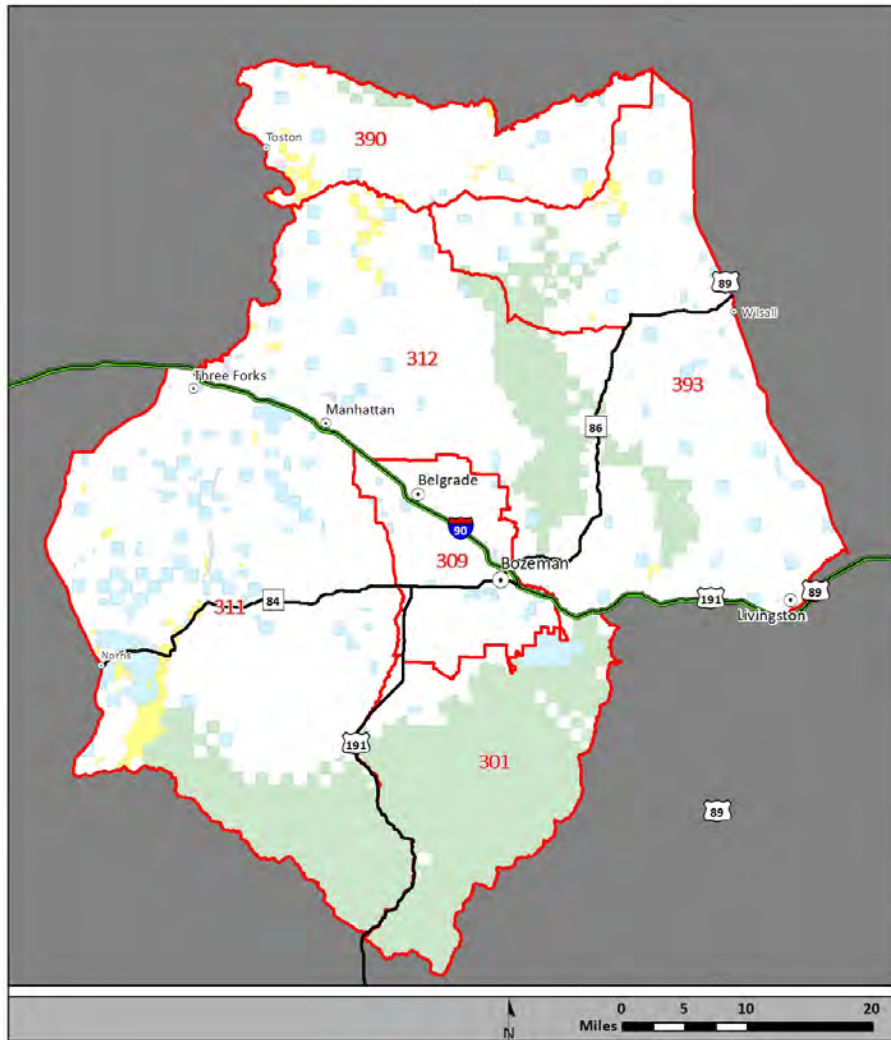


Figure 1: Affected area of proposed changes. Deer and elk hunting district boundaries in red.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 318 & 335 (LPT 394-00)

Year: 2020-2021

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Remove the bull restriction from the antlerless permit currently valid in both HD 318 and HD 335. This would be consistent with the season structure proposed for HDs 339 and 343.

Both antlerless permits and licenses have been offered in these districts. An antlerless elk permit valid in both districts has been in place since the 2016 season.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of this proposal is to respond to public input from the season change approved by the FWC for the 2018-2019 seasons for two other districts with the Helena area wildlife biologist's jurisdiction (HDs 339 and 343). The public comment we received at that time was largely against the bull restriction, which was part of that proposal to move to an antlerless elk permit valid in both districts.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

This proposal will be considered successful if hunters are satisfied with this change. We have not found a strong biological argument supporting the bull restriction, and we understand that there was a time when this restriction was not in place. We have also noted there are districts with a single permit

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

valid for both brow-tined bulls and antlerless elk. Therefore, we would like to respond to the social interest in eliminating the restriction.

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

HD 318 was within population objective in winter 2018-2019. The count for HD 335 tends to fluctuate substantially from within to well above objective from year to year, and this is thought to be largely due to a distribution issue.

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

N/A.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

This proposal was discussed with the R3 Wildlife Manager, wildlife biologists and enforcement, and all were in support of this proposal. It will also be discussed with constituent groups this fall, as hunters start to convene their meetings again.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika

Date: 09/26/2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 333

Year: 2019

- 7. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

The proposal is to remove Hunting District (HD) 333 from the 399-00 elk B-license bundle and create an elk B-License (333-01; quota 500, range=100–1,000). The proposed license would be valid for antlerless elk harvest outside of National Forest lands in HD 333. The general elk license would remain valid for brow-tine bull or antlerless elk across the HD.

The general license has been valid for brow-tine bull or antlerless elk for the entire hunting season since 2008. During 2005–2007, the general license was valid of brow-tine bull-only during the first week of the rifle season and brow-tine bull or antlerless elk during the final four weeks of the general rifle season. The HD has been apart of the 399-00 antlerless B-license bundle since 2016. During 2008–2015, an antlerless B-license was valid across the HD and HD 320. During that time, the license quota ranged from 25 to 300. Prior to 2005, the general license was valid for brow-tine bull-only harvest. Antlerless elk harvest was managed through B-license or permit quotas.

- 8. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The current management objective is to reduce the post-hunting season elk population to less than 600 observed elk, which is approximately half of the population objective for the Tobacco Roots Elk Management Unit (HDs 320 and 333) (EMU). The proposed change will increase the number of antlerless elk B-Licenses available to hunters in HD 333, and focus use of those licenses towards the portion of the HD where elk populations are growing—outside of National Forest lands.

Quotas of 25 to 300 antlerless B-licenses have been issued across the Tobacco Roots EMU while the general license regulation was brow-tine bull or antlerless elk. During those years (N=8), harvest

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

success on the B-licenses averaged 12% (range = 0–23%). Given past harvest rates, 500 B-licenses is expected to result in approximately 60 and as many as 115 harvests.

9. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Effectiveness of the proposal would be measured through elk population trend data and harvest survey data collected for the proposed 333-01 license.

10. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The population objective for the Tobacco Roots EMU is 800–1,200 elk observed post-hunting season. The population has exceeded the management objective each of the last three and four of the last five years (Figure 1). This has been most influenced by growing elk populations in HD 333, which has exceeded 600 elk (approximately half of the management objective for the EMU) eight of the last ten years and exceeded 900 two of the last three years (Figure 2). At least 80% of elk in HD 333 are believed to currently be distributed outside of National Forest Lands during the fall hunting seasons. The population is believed to be influenced to some degree by elk immigrating and emigrating to and from HD 311.

11. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Timing and depth of initial fall snow accumulation influences elk harvest across the Tobacco Roots EMU. However, limited hunter access and local hunter pursuit of adult bulls with a general license are believed to currently influence antlerless elk harvest in this area more-so than snowfall. On lands where hunters gain access to hunt but pursue adult bulls with a general license, increased B-licenses are expected to measurably increase antlerless elk harvest. Some landowners and hunters hunting on these lands have expressed that more antlerless elk would get harvested if more hunters could obtain B-licenses. On those lands where few hunters gain access, increased B-licenses are not expected to increase elk harvest.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Elk game damage complaints associated with irrigated agriculture in HD 333 have become chronic during the last five years. One multi-landowner management season and several individual-landowner game damage hunts have been approved and implemented with minimal effectiveness. The nature of elk feeding on agricultural fields during the night and returning to the hills, often on neighboring properties, during the day has proven difficult to address through game damage roster hunters. A series of individual-landowner supplemental license hunts were approved and implemented during early fall 2019 to increase response time of hunters. The effectiveness of these licenses remains unknown. Several haystack corrals and plastic haystack fence has been approved and issued to individual landowners to protect stored hay from wintering elk. Several area landowners have been denied game damage assistance because they did not meet statutory requirements for assistance.

If the proposed B-license is implemented and effective at returning the elk population to within objective, the intention would be to return the HD to the 399-00 B-license bundle. If the proposed recommendation for general license brow-tine bull or antlerless elk and liberal antlerless B-Licenses is implemented and not effective at moving the population towards the management objective, an antlerless-only season outside of National Forest Lands should be implemented until the population is reduced to less than 600 elk.

12. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Feedback regarding this proposal and a proposal for antlerless-only harvest outside of National Forest lands was solicited through the Sheridan area wildlife biologist's interested persons email list following the completion of the 2019 population survey of the HD. This list is comprised of 149 hunters, non-hunters, FWP enforcement staff, sportsmen's group representatives, non-government organization representatives, landowners, county commissioners, and state representatives. The area Game Warden, Bill Dawson has been consulted through all phases of proposal development and has vetted the possible proposal to several area landowners during game damage complaint contacts.

To date, three hunters expressed support for an antlerless-only season and six landowners local to the area expressed support for increased antlerless B-licenses or an antlerless-only season until the population is reduced.

Submitted by: Dean Waltee

Date: September 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk
Region: 3
Hunting Districts: 334
Year: 2020-21 Biennium

1. Describe the proposed season /quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.)

For HD 334:

- Increase upper end of 334-00 Elk B license quota range from 250 to 350. Retain 25 as the lower limit.
- Increase 334-00 Elk B licenses from 250 to 350. This is INSIDE the quota range if the proposed change to the upper limit is adopted.
- Allow Either-sex harvest opportunity on the general license to hunters with a Permit To Hunt From Vehicle (PTHFV) valid during both archery and general season.

Hunting District 334 (Mussigbrod) was created in 2010 when HD 321 (West Big Hole) was split into 2 districts. HD 334 is summer range for elk that winter primarily in the East Fork of the Bitterroot. The population in HD 334 represents the migratory segment of the HD270 elk herd.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Since 2010 HD334 has been in a standard season structure with brow-tined bull/antlerless elk harvest opportunity during the archery season and for PTHFV hunters, either-sex elk opportunity for youth, brow-tined bull harvest opportunity on the general license during the 5-week season, and antlerless harvest occurring on 125 Elk B licenses. Due to the increasing population trend the number of Elk B licenses offered was increased to 250 in 2018.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change?

The objective of this proposal is to preemptively stem the current population growth in HD 334 (i.e. the migratory segment of the HD 270 wintering elk herd) to avoid habitat degradation and increasing game damage which would have a greater impact on this elk herd in the long run. A secondary objective is to manage this herd in a moderate fashion with sustained regulations rather than waiting until dramatic changes to season structures are warranted. A third objective is to increase hunter opportunity during existing seasons (i.e. archery and general) rather than employ shoulder seasons.

It is expected that this proposal will be accompanied by a similar proposal for HD 270 to increase antlerless elk harvest opportunity during archery and general seasons.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured?

This management proposal will be measured using annual population and harvest data. Specifically, the data will be monitored to ensure that the population in each hunting district decreases slightly. HD 334 is surveyed from the air annually during the summer when elk are present in the district. Data derived from this survey includes total number of elk observed and production (number of calves per 100 cows).

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives?

Since HD 334 was created after the 2005 Elk Management Plan, there is no official management objective for this district. It has been managed for a sustainable population of 800-1,000 elk that allows for maximizing hunter opportunity and minimizing game damage complaints. Since 2014 the number of observed elk during summer aerial surveys has been greater than 1,000. During the most recent survey (July 2019), 1,382 elk were counted, suggesting a 59% increase over the long-term average of 872. Calf production was 43 calves per 100 cows, which has dropped from 57 in 2018 and a long-term average of 49. This apparent reduction in production can likely be attributed all or in part to harsh late-

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

winter conditions that could cause abortions or fetal absorption and high female calf over-winter survival. These female calves would be yearlings at the time of the survey and classified as cows yet represent a non-breeding segment of that population.

Table 1: Population data for elk in HD 334, 2010-2019

Year	Total	Calves*	Cows	Bulls	Uncl All	Calf:Cow	Bull:Cow
2010	836	264	542	30	0	49	6
2011	644	283	398	47	16	46	12
2012	583	167	394	22	0	42	6
2013	587	179	336	27	0	53	8
2014	1027	233	509	35	250	46	11
2015	835	236	418	45	136	57	11
2016	1002	307	626	39	0	49	11
2017	1088	320	730	39	0	44	5
2018	738	259	453	26	0	57	6
2019	1382	369	855	55	103	43	6
L-T Ave	872	262	526	37	51	49	8

*Because HD 334 is summer range, elk aerial surveys are done in late July. The calf count represents production instead of recruitment.

**Will be surveyed in late July.

The long-term average for harvest success on the Elk B licenses in HD 334 is 24% (Table 2). Youth, archery, and PTHFV harvest has accounted for 8-36 additional antlerless elk harvested in HD 334 over the past 8 years. If this proposal is adopted, we anticipate antlerless elk harvest to increase by 30-60 animals annually, yielding 80-110 harvested annually. This level of antlerless harvest would slightly offset annual recruitment thus moderately reversing the population growth trend and in a sustainable way where B license quotas can be adjusted annually as needed.

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Table 2: Harvest data for elk in HD 334, 2010-2018.

Lic Year	Total Harv	# Blic issued	Harv on Blic	%mgmt succ on Blic	Males	Females	Young
2010	79	125	29	23	31	44	5
2011	68	125	35	28	25	43	0
2012	70	125	9	7	49	15	6
2013	77	125	32	26	36	37	4
2014	97	125	43	35	28	64	5
2015	93	125	26	21	44	48	2
2016	79	125	29	23	30	44	5
2017	102	125	23	18	62	37	3
2018	128	250	34	14	57	64	6
L-T Ave	88			24	43	44	4

There has been an average of 600 hunters representing 3,689 hunter days in HD 334 over the past 9 years. We expect to see a slight increase in the number of hunters in HD 334 with the adoption of this proposal. We do not expect to see a noticeable increase in the number of nonresident hunters with this proposal.

Table 3. Hunter effort data for elk in HD 334, 2010-2018.

Lic Year	# Hunters	# Days	Days per Hunter	# NR Hunters	# NR Days	NR_Days/Hunter
2010	509	2988	6	66	335	5
2011	509	3155	6	35	551	16
2012	660	4055	6	98	654	7
2013	na	na	na	na	na	na

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Justifications**

2014	646	3889	6	108	730	7
2015	599	3672	6	64	381	6
2016	678	4375	6	110	849	8
2017	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2018	509	2988	6	66	335	5
L-T Ave	600	3689	6	80	583	8

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident or nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).**

Hunting access in HD 334 occurs primarily on Forest Service lands. There is limited access to private lands. Radio-collared studies on the Bitterroot elk herd in recent years show that a sizable portion of elk that winter in the East Fork of the Bitterroot migrate to the Big Hole Valley to calve and spend the summer. By mid-November, most of the herd has migrated out of the Big Hole and back over to the Bitterroot. Because of these limitations to access, elk in this district have a significant amount of spatial and temporal security.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

This proposal has been circulated among the Butte area biologist's large list of contacts. This list includes adjacent biologists, wardens, landowners, local conservation clubs and chapters, and individual sportsmen and women.

Submitted by: Vanna Boccadori (Butte Area Wildlife Biologist)

Date: 8 October 2019

Approved: _____

Region 3 Supervisor / Date

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 339 & 343 (LPT 396-00)

Year: 2020-2021

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Remove the bull restriction from the antlerless permit currently valid in both HD 339 and HD 343.

For the 2018-2019 seasons, the antlerless licenses in 2 hunting districts (HDs), 339 and 343, in the Granite Butte Elk Management Unit (EMU) were converted to antlerless permit valid across HDs 339 and 343. Six-hundred permits were offered for both seasons. Prior season structure for antlerless opportunity varied across both hunting districts and included antlerless elk licenses, antlerless elk permits, split seasons (some portion of the season allowed antlerless elk harvest with a valid general license), and a full 5-week antlerless opportunity with a general elk license.

In HD 339, 300 to 500 antlerless licenses or permits were issued annually from 1993 through the 2017 seasons, except for the 2009 season, when 799 permits were issued. In HD 343, 300 to 450 licenses were issued from 1993 through the 2017 season, except for the 2009 season, when 600 permits were issued. For the 2017 season, HD 339 offered 300 antlerless elk licenses, and HD 343 offered 300 antlerless elk licenses. Quotas are prescribed annually prior to license/permit drawings.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of this proposal is to respond to public input from the season change approved by the FWC for the 2018-2019 seasons. The public comment we received at that time was largely against the bull restriction, which was part of the proposal to move to an antlerless elk permit.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

This proposal will be considered successful if hunters are satisfied with this change. We have not found a strong biological argument supporting the bull restriction, and we understand that there was a time when this restriction was not in place. We have also noted there are districts with a single permit valid for both brow-tined bulls and antlerless elk. Therefore, we would like to respond to the social interest in eliminating the restriction.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

When the objectives for HDs 339 and 343 were combined, collectively these districts were slightly above or within objective for 29 out of 31 years. HD 339 was within and above objective during those years. In winter 2018 – 2019, 865 elk were counted putting the HD slightly above the population objective ($700 \pm 20\%$; 560 – 840). HD 343 was below, above, and within objective over the past 25 years. The number observed in winter 2018-2019 was within objective at 830 ($700 \pm 20\%$; 560 – 840). The Granite Butte EMU (HDs 339, 343, and 293) has been within objective for at least 20 of the past 31 years (survey data incomplete for nine of those years). Some of the additional elk observed east of the divide in some winters, likely remain west of the continental divide in HD 293 during other, presumably milder, winters. In short, we think sudden, large changes in elk numbers within a given district are more likely due to redistribution of elk than sudden, large increases in the population.

In response to increasing numbers of elk observed in any one of these three districts, liberal seasons and/or increases in antlerless elk licenses and/or permits were instituted:

- In 2008 and 2009, HD 293 was open for antlerless harvest with a general license for one week in the middle of the rifle season.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

- In 2009, the number of antlerless permits issued was increased substantially in HDs 339 and 343. In 2010 and 2011, HDs 339 and 343 were open for antlerless harvest with a general license for the last two weeks of the rifle season.
- In 2012 and 2013, HD 339 was open for antlerless harvest for the entire five-week rifle season.

Hunting pressure has varied from district to district due in large part to these liberal season types. We think that elk have responded to these changes in hunting pressure by redistributing to other parts of the EMU with less pressure (any of the three districts depending on the year) and to some areas with little or no pressure (e.g., HD 293 since the 2010 season). This isn't to say that we haven't had some success at increasing antlerless elk harvest in districts where we thought it was warranted; some structures were better than others, and snowfall played a large part in the amount of harvest. Considering the EMU as a whole indicates that additional harvest is not necessarily warranted given differences between elk distribution in the fall and winter and given that the EMU-level population objective is being met. However, management is not being approached at the EMU-level. It would be acceptable if the number of elk observed during winter surveys in any of these hunting districts was sometimes above or below the district-level population objective, so long as the EMU population objective is sustained and access to antlerless elk during the regular fall seasons on both public and private lands remains relatively well distributed across the EMU. Such access is not well distributed. Due to season types, there is very limited hunting access for antlerless elk during the regular fall seasons on public land in HD 293, but there is a shoulder season in HD 293 (private land only in the south portion of the district).

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

That part of the EMU east of the continental divide is more open with less snow fall than the west side and has more open parks, i.e., winter range. That part of the EMU west of the continental divide has more secure habitat during fall on public lands and contains a higher proportion of the public land within the EMU. Hunter access is very good on private lands east of the continental divide, while there are several private land refuges west of the continental divide. Winter weather and snowfall affect both elk distribution and harvest.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

This proposal was discussed with the R3 Wildlife Manager, wildlife biologists and enforcement, and all were in support of this proposal. R3 would prefer an EMU-wide permit be considered by both the

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FWC and the public, but that is not in line with Region 2's management philosophy at this time. It will also be discussed with constituent groups this fall, as hunters start to convene their meetings again.

Submitted by: Jenny Sika

Date: 08/27/2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting Districts: 350 & 370

Year: 2020-21 Biennium

1. Describe the proposed season /quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.)

For Hunting District 350:

- Remove antlerless elk harvest opportunity from the general license during the General Season (retain it for the Archery Season).
- Eliminate 399-01 Elk B licenses.
- Create 350-01 Elk B licenses valid in HD 350 only. Set quota at 150 with a range of 25-300.

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- Allow Either-sex harvest opportunity for Youth and PTHFV hunters on the general license during the archery and general seasons.

For Hunting District 370:

- Eliminate 399-01 Elk B licenses.
- Create 370-01 Elk B licenses valid in HD 370 only. Set quota at 150 with a range of 25-300.
- Allow Either-sex harvest opportunity for Youth and PTHFV hunters on the general license during the archery and general seasons.

Hunting Districts 350 and 370 are part of the Highlands EMU. Because elk herds move freely throughout the Whitetail Valley and surrounding Bull Mountains and Whitetail Basin, HDs 350 and 370 have been managed collectively since 2010 to reduce the collective population to within objective range. The main tools used include Elk B licenses valid in both hunting districts (125-400 issued annually) and liberal seasons since 2014 (2-5 weeks brow-tined bull/antlerless harvest during the general season). Harvest and aerial survey data since 2017 suggest that this level of antlerless harvest opportunity has been effective at lowering the population to within the upper end of the objective range and that harvest has been differential across the districts with the greater amount occurring in HD 350.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change?

The objective of this proposal is to redistribute elk harvest in HDs 350 and 370 in a way that sustains elk populations in each hunting district yet continues to minimize game damage impacts.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured?

This management proposal will be measured using annual population and harvest data. Specifically, the data will be monitored to ensure that the population in each hunting district stays within the targeted range of 240-360 elk observed during winter aerial surveys.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives?

HDs 350/370: According to the 2005 Elk Management Plan, the population objective for HDs 350 and 370 combined is $600 \pm 20\%$ (480-720) elk observed during winter aerial surveys. Since 2018 winter counts have been 19-79 animals above the high end of the

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

population objective range, which is the closest it's been to being within range for over a decade (Table 1).

Table 1: Population data for elk in HDs 350 and 370 combined, 2011-2019.

Year	Total
2011	832
2012	
2013	897
2014	709
2015	1171
2016	1090
2017	
2018	739
2019	799
L-T Ave*	891

An average of 297 elk have been harvested in HDs 350 and 370 combined since 2010 (Table 2). Antlerless harvest has come from liberal opportunity on the general license, youth, PTHFV, archery season and several game damage hunts in each district. Harvest success on the Elk B license has averaged 24% and contributed 20-90 additional antlerless elk to the total harvest since 2010. A heavy snowfall during the 2017 hunting season allowed for 326 cow elk harvested, with the majority of that harvest occurring in HD 350 (Table 4).

Table 2: Harvest data for elk in HDs 350 and 370 combined, 2010-2018.

Lic Year	Total Harv	# Blic issued*	Harv on Blic	%mgmt succ on Blic	Males	Females	Young
2010	265	250	66	26	152	102	11

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2011	221	350	90	26	101	108	12
2012	341	350	76	22	210	117	15
2013	211	400	63	16	109	100	2
2014	322	250	20	8	194	118	10
2015	346	350	38	11	173	164	9
2016	246	350	41	12	69	160	17
2017	475	350	62	18	140	326	8
2018	243	150	11	7	102	131	9
L-T Ave	297		52	16	139	147	10

When data is assessed for each district separately, it suggests that since 2013 the number of elk observed during winter aerial surveys has been consistently lower (Table 3) while harvest has been consistently greater (Table 4) in HD 350 than in HD 370.

Table 3: Population data for elk in HDs 350 and 370, 2011-2019.

Year	HD 350 Total	HD 370 Total
2011	570	262
2012	313	311
2013	386	~511
2014	261	448
2015	488	683
2016	373	717
2017	135	392

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Justifications**

2018	179	560
2019	195	604
L-T Ave	357	602

Table 4: Harvest data for elk in HD 350s and 370, 2010-2018.

Lic Year	HD 350 Total Harv	HD 370 Total Harv
2010	164	101
2011	120	101
2012	218	123
2013	118	93
2014	164	158
2015	205	141
2016	150	96
2017	289	186
2018	138	105
L-T Ave	144	114

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident or nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature / precipitation information).**

Access is good in HD 350 on both private and public land. Several landowners on both the east and west side of the district are enrolled in the Block Management program and provide access to over 1,300 hunters annually. There are numerous access points to federal land throughout the district. In HD 370, access is more restricted. Private land enrolled in Block Management has decreased significantly over the past 7 years, making access to private

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Justifications**

and landlocked public land difficult. Much of the private land in HD 370 is leased to private outfitting. Limited free public access is granted to some private lands to cow hunters or through Block Management.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal has been circulated among the Butte area biologist's large list of contacts. This list includes adjacent biologists, wardens, landowners, local conservation clubs and chapters, and individual sportsmen and women.

Submitted by: Vanna Boccadori

Date: 20 September 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 391

Year: 2020/21

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

The proposal would change the current district wide general 5-week brow-tined bull/antlerless season structure to brow-tined bull only on National Forest land with the brow-tined bull/antlerless season structure remaining in place off National Forest land. The existing shoulder season would also remain in place.

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective is to increase elk numbers and elk presence on National Forest land during not only the hunting season but year-round by decreasing elk harvest and hunting pressure on National Forest land. Increased elk use of National Forest land throughout the year would correspondingly result in less elk use of private land in the HD.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Annual aerial elk surveys of HD 391 will be used to monitor the status of the elk population while overall harvest success will be monitored via the Department's annual telephone harvest survey. Area check-station information will be utilized to determine if hunters are seeing more elk on National Forest land during the hunting season in the future.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

While overall observed elk numbers in the HD have been well above objective since the HD was reconstituted in 2016 as part of a major boundary change involving HDs 391 & 392, elk numbers and elk presence on National Forest land in the HD continue to get worse. It's estimated that 90-95%+ of the elk in the HD are found on private land with little to no public hunting access during the hunting season while the bulk of the hunting pressure in the HD occurs on National Forest land. Elk hunter success rate on National Forest land in the HD is estimated to be in the low single digits at best.

Overall elk numbers in the HD are believed to be somewhere between the 1,182 elk observed during the 2019 winter survey (felt a bunch of elk were missed during the survey) and the 1,539 elk observed during the 2018 winter survey. The point objective for the HD is 975 (780-1,170), so we

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

are currently over objective overall for the HD. However, as noted previously, this is believed to be the result of the overwhelming majority of the elk being found on properties with little to no public hunting access during the general rifle season. Elk numbers/presence on National Forest land is generally abysmal during the hunting season even though National Forest land comprises approximately 40% of the HD. Elk use of private property during the remainder of the year is also quite common in the HD.

HD 391 is currently part of the Bridger EMU. Given that the overall number of observed elk (winter survey) is over objective, a liberal regulation of 5-weeks general brow-tined bull/antlerless elk is currently in place. In addition, there is a shoulder season until Feb. 15 for antlerless elk B-licenses (not valid on National Forest land) in the south portion of the HD (south of Duck Creek).

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The proposed regulation change would decrease the hunting opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters in the HD to a limited degree – generally not a lot of antlerless elk found on National Forest land compared to the number found on private land. While approximately 40% of the HD is National Forest land, most of the elk in the HD are found on properties with little to no public hunting access during the hunting season. Most of the private property in the HD with elk during the hunting season is either outfitted or has little to no public hunting access. There are several block management areas in the HD, all of which get a lot of hunting pressure, and elk presence on those BMAs during the hunting season is generally pretty minimal.

Weather this past winter (2018/19) started out generally mild but then turned severe, so elk calf survival and recruited was negatively impacted to some degree. There may have been some mortality impacts on adult elk as well particularly in the older age classes, but impacts were believed to be minimal at the most. This spring/summer/early fall we had good moisture and cooler temps for the most part so forage conditions/quality on native range should have been good.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal was developed late in the process, so there was little opportunity for input/comments from hunters and landowners on the proposal. However, we have received numerous complaints from both hunters and landowners over the years regarding the lack of elk on National Forest land in the HD. That being said, some hunters will likely be opposed to this proposal, as not being able to shoot antlerless elk on National Forest land will decrease their opportunity given the lack of public hunting access to private lands in the HD that have elk during the hunting season. Some landowners

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

will also likely be opposed to the proposal, as they believe that elk should be harvested wherever they may be found to help reduce overall elk numbers in the HD. The Townsend area game warden was contacted about the recommendation, and he expressed concerns about the loss of hunter opportunity to harvest an antlerless elk on National Forest land, and he also expressed concerns regarding enforcement of the regulation and complicating the regulations.

Submitted by: Adam Grove, Wildlife Biologist – Townsend

Date: October 23, 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Table 1. Elk survey data for HD 391.

ELK AERIAL TREND COUNT SUMMARY FORM														
HUNTING DISTRICT 391 (data is for 'new' HD 391 effective 2016, result of major boundary change)														
DATE	BTBs	YRLG	COWS	CALVES	ANTL-	UNCL.	TOTAL	Bulls/ 100 Cows	Bulls/ 100 Antlerless	% Bulls of Total	% BTB of Total	% BTB of Bulls	Calves/ 100 Cows	Calves/ 100 Adults
2019	27	85	538	125		407	1,182	20.8	16.9	9.5%	2.3%	24.1%	23.2	19.2
2018	31	115	1032	361			1,539	14.1	10.5	9.5%	2.0%	21.2%	35.0	30.6
2017	61	166	1046	380		191	1,844	21.7	15.9	12.3%	3.3%	26.9%	36.3	29.9
2016\$	43	123	612	197		404	1,379	27.1	20.5	12.0%	3.1%	25.9%	32.2	25.3
2015	13	96	1,091	351		501	2,052	10.0	7.6	5.3%	0.6%	11.9%	32.2	29.3
2014*														
2013*														
2012	13	121	1,177	337		15	1,663	11.4	8.9	8.1%	0.8%	9.7%	28.6	25.7
2011	18	131	1,242	302			1,693	12.0	9.7	8.8%	1.1%	12.1%	24.3	21.7
2010	2	63				1070	1,135			5.7%	0.2%	3.1%		
2009	7	63				1,477	1,547			4.5%	0.5%	10.0%		
2008	6	81	777	123		262	1,249	11.2	9.7	7.0%	0.5%	6.9%	15.8	14.2
2007	9	73	885	199			1,166	9.3	7.6	7.0%	0.8%	11.0%	22.5	20.6
2006	2	37	683	157		23	902	5.7	4.6	4.3%	0.2%	5.1%	23.0	21.7
2005	10	56	657	207			930	10.0	7.6	7.1%	1.1%	15.2%	31.5	28.6
2004	6	57	921	136			1,120	6.8	6.0	5.6%	0.5%	9.5%	14.8	13.8
2003	12	49	469	151			681	13.0	9.8	9.0%	1.8%	19.7%	32.2	28.5
Ave	17	88	883	242		493	1,350	12.7	9.9	7.6%	1.2%	13.4%	27.4	24.2
('03 - '18)														
* - Complete survey of current district not flown														
\$- Major hunting district boundary change in 2016														
HD 391 Objective: 975 (780 - 1,170)														

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Table 2. Elk harvest related information for HD 391 (2002-2018).



Year	Total Harvest	M	F	Calves	# B-Licenses/ Permits	B- License Harvest	% Succ	Anti- Hary General
2018	505	212	272	21	400 [^]	75	18.8%	202
2017	841	343	448	50	350	98	28.1%	358
2016*	613	224	367	22	350	56	16.0%	268
2015	498	270	204	24	475	99	20.9%	88
2014	406	239	152	15	300	109	36.2%	59
2013	311	181	119	11	250	80	32.1%	50
2012	307	216	79	12	250	51	20.4%	42
2011	262	140	105	17	250	85	34.0%	42
2010	377	212	154	10	250	84	33.6%	78
2009	306	199	95	12	250	83	33.2%	21
2008	259	185	66	5	250	44	17.8%	27
2007	354	198	147	9	250	105	42.0%	48
2006	347	185	134	22	250	88	35.2%	63
2005	294	173	109	11	250	68	27.2%	52
2004	272	159	95	17	249	59	23.8%	52
2003	317	185	119	9	250	64	25.6%	54
2002	280	151	117	11	250	111	53.9%	11
Ave	328	192	121	13	270	81	31.1%	49

('02-'15)

[^] - B-licenses valid until Feb 15.

*Major boundary change implemented in 2016, so results aren't comparable to previous years

Note: Numbers are point estimates only (confidence intervals are associated with estimates) and are rounded

Note: Numbers may not add up due to 'illegal' harvest reports, i.e. HD 391 harvest reported on license/permit types not valid in HD 391

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 3

Hunting District: 392

Year: 2020/21

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Proposal would eliminate the general rifle season antlerless elk opportunity for youth and PTHFV hunters and reduce the number of antlerless elk B-licenses from 50 to 25 (new quota range of 25-200).

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective is to increase overall elk numbers in the HD. Observed elk numbers in this HD have been well below objective since the HD was reconstituted in 2016 as part of a major boundary change involving HDs 391 & 392. The level of antlerless elk harvest on a general license by youth/PTHFV hunters (only ones legally allowed during the rifle season on a general license) is simply too high to allow elk numbers to increase to the desired objective level.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Annual aerial elk surveys of HD 392 will be used to monitor the status of the elk population to determine if the objectives of the proposed change are being met, i.e. an increase in elk numbers. Harvest success will be monitored via the Department's annual telephone harvest survey.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

A total of only 157 elk were observed in the HD this past winter although it was felt that a fair number of elk (100+?) were likely missed during the survey. Observed elk numbers in this HD continue to be well below objective (see Table 1), and the level of harvest (see Table 2) on a general license by youth/PTHFV hunters (only ones legally allowed during the rifle season on a general license) is simply too high to allow elk numbers to increase to the desired objective level. Antlerless harvest by archery hunters and elk B-license holders is far below the level of elk harvest on a general license (youth/PTHFV hunters). HD 392 comprises the West Big Belts EMU which following a major boundary change that was implemented in 2016 has an observed objective of 400 elk (320-480). Given that elk numbers are below objective, the Restrictive Regulation package is called for which is six-weeks brow-tined bull/antlerless elk for archery and 5-weeks brow-tined bull with few antlerless elk B-licenses

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

The proposed regulation change will decrease the hunting opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters (primarily youth and PTHFV hunters) in the HD to a limited degree. Most of the HD is public land (over 90%) comprised of USFS & BLM land with only a small amount of private land (mostly smaller parcels) so access is very good in the HD. There are a couple of small outfitted properties in the HD. Weather this past winter (2018/19) started out generally mild but then turned severe, so elk calf survival and recruited was negatively impacted to some degree. There may have been some mortality impacts on adult elk as well particularly in the older age classes, but impacts were believed to be minimal at the most. This spring/summer/early fall we had good moisture and cooler temps for the most part so forage conditions/quality on native range should have been good.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Members of Helena Hunters & Anglers and the Townsend Rod & Gun Club were made aware of the proposal and asked for their comments on the proposal. Only one comment, which was in support of the proposal, was received. Given the fact that over 90% of the HD is public land, and what little private land there is generally has minimal hunting access, the impact of the proposal is expected to be negligible on private landowners. Area game wardens contacted about the recommendation were either supportive of or at least apparently okay with the proposed recommendation.

Submitted by: Adam Grove, Wildlife Biologist – Townsend

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Date: October 14, 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk
Region: 3
Hunting District: 393
Year: 2020

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

The proposed season is to return HD 393 to the same liberal regulation it had in 2015: brow-tined bull or antlerless elk during the archery and first four weeks of the general rifle season with last week of general rifle season antlerless elk only. Concurrently, it would re-introduce a district-specific unlimited Elk B license which would be allowed for antlerless elk from archery only through the end of rifle season.

The current season structure is a shoulder season with brow-tined bull or antlerless elk from the start of archery season until the last week of rifle season when it becomes antlerless elk only. The shoulder season then allows an antlerless elk on the general license through the end of February 15th (not valid on National Forest Land). There are also unlimited antlerless Elk B licenses (397-00) valid from August 15th-February 15th, which allow harvest in districts 312, 390, and 393.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

One objective of this proposed change is to follow through with the intent of the shoulder season performance evaluation criteria by removing the trial shoulder season regulation from this underperforming district. The shoulder season was implemented as a three-year trial prescription to increase elk harvest, but consistently failed in meeting criteria (Table 1).

Another objective of this proposed change is to increase elk harvest in HD 393 by returning to a prior season type which showed promise during the two years it was implemented: antlerless only during the last week of season while concurrently working with landowners to become eligible for large-scale management season hunts which were effectively used to increase harvest.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success of this proposal will be measured through harvest surveys. If returning to the old regulation returns to higher than long-term average harvest rates, it will be successful.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The Bridger Elk Management Unit consists of HD 390, HD 393, and HD 312. All three districts were placed in modified shoulder season types in 2016. HD 312 consistently meets shoulder season harvest criteria (Table 1), but its population seems stable (Figure 1) and harvest has significantly increased (Figure 2). HD 390 is not consistently meeting shoulder season harvest criteria (Table 1), but under shoulder season regulation, its population counts have decreased by 500 elk (Figure 1) and total elk harvest in this district has increased (Figure 2). By comparison, in HD 393, counts have increased by >400 elk, appear to be trending upward (Figure 1), and total number of elk harvested has not increased under the shoulder season regulation (Figure 2). In HD 393, the current population count is 3,489 elk, which is more than double population objective of 1,500 elk. During the three-year shoulder season trial period, counts increased by 400 elk.

2020-2021 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range Justifications

Table 1: Shoulder season evaluation criteria by hunting district, available on-line at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/seasons/elkShoulder/>

Montana 2016, 2017 and 2018 combined Montana Shoulder Season Performance Criteria Evaluation.										
Hunting District(s)	2016 + 2017 + 2018		2016 + 2017 + 2018 Harvest Criteria - Harvest that is needed and harvest that was realized							
	Recruitment		Archery and General Seasons ^a				All Seasons Combined ^b (Archery+General+Shoulder)			
	Cows	Bulls	Adult Cows		#	Adult Bulls		Adult Cows		Cows + Bulls + Calves
			Needed	Realized		Needed	Realized	Needed	Realized	
210/211	591	369	301	419	188	550	591	825	960	1404
212/213	534	363	272	394	185	630	534	683	897	1367
215	841	561	429	725	286	926	841	1328	1402	2308
217	319	213	163	141	109	151	319	477	532	651
290/298	220	146	112	226	74	195	220	375	366	594
291	402	267	205	183	136	284	402	427	669	732
312	534	356	272	497	182	651	534	777	890	1475
390	721	481	368	366	245	393	721	606	1202	1044
393	1480	987	755	620	503	755	1480	1048	2467	1859
411/511/530	2675	1850	1364	876	944	855	2675	1470	4525	2411
412	261	174	133	230	89	204	261	384	435	610
421/423	200	134	102	147	68	258	200	325	334	606
422	468	312	239	191	159	193	468	404	780	610
445/455	1407	938	718	591	478	519	1407	765	2345	1343
446	751	501	383	412	256	606	751	753	1252	1434
449/452	534	356	272	357	182	478	534	576	890	1130
451	235	157	120	54	80	122	235	125	392	258
502/510/520/575	1144	768	583	485	392	444	1144	756	1912	1244
540	1091	726	556	340	370	347	1091	495	1817	886
560N	578	385	295	275	196	409	578	475	963	929
570	211	141	108	116	72	160	211	209	352	385
580	1515	1010	773	566	515	824	1515	961	2525	1832
590N	1209	805	617	582	411	706	1209	877	2014	1628
620/621/622	1216	811	620	748	414	664	1216	863	2027	1563
630/631/632	276	183	141	135	93	164	276	181	459	354
680/690	325	217	166	176	111	110	325	208	542	332
Total	19738	13211	10066	9852	6738	11598	19738	16373	32949	28989

^aHarvest of adult bulls and cows (no calves) during the archery and general seasons combined must be a number ≥51% of recruitment for both bulls and cows.

^bHarvest during all seasons combined (archery, general and shoulder seasons) must be a combined harvest of bulls, cows and calves ≥100% of recruitment of all elk.

Note: There were also shoulder seasons in HDs 101, 109, 292 and 311 designed to address the fundamental objective of "Address problematic distributions of elk and elk harvest" and are not subject to harvest criteria.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

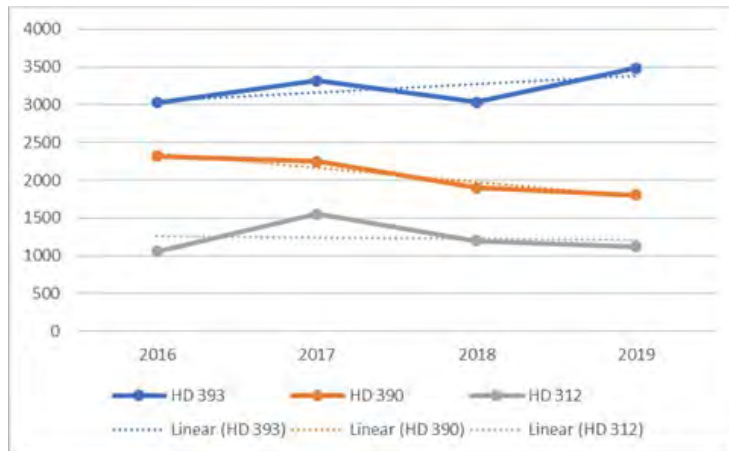


Figure 1: Total elk counted by hunting district during the shoulder season evaluation period. The 2016 starting point represents counts taken after general hunting season 2015, so represent the population before shoulder seasons were implemented. 2017-2019 counts occurred in winter during or after the 2016-2018 shoulder seasons.

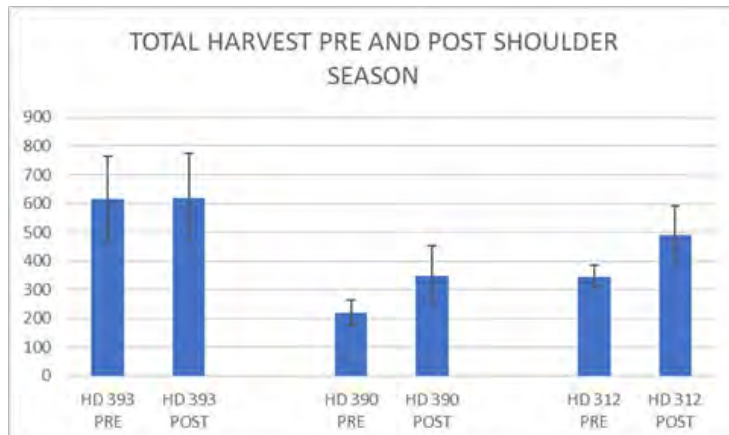


Figure 2: The average number of all elk harvested by hunting district for the 7 years before shoulder seasons (2009-2015) and the three years during shoulder seasons (2016-2018). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around average total harvest.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Prior to the establishment of shoulder seasons, FWP and local landowners worked together to meet game damage eligibility requirements of hunter access during the general season in order to have a large-scale management season. During these 2 years, total elk harvest increased from its prior 2009-2013 average of 499 elk to a 2014-2015 average of 902 elk. This combination of work was clearly most effective to increasing harvests. Once shoulder seasons were established and such working relationships were no longer needed, it reduced the incentive to work together to reduce elk numbers.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

The proposal was vetted at an internal FWP meeting on October 23rd with wildlife and enforcement personnel from around the state. Several sportsmen and sportsmen's groups have expressed support for the proposal.

Submitted by: Howard Burt

Date: 11/19/19

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 4

Hunting District: 410

Year: 2020-2021

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

1. Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). **REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

For the upcoming 2020-21 hunting seasons:

- Change the 410-02 Elk B License, such that it is valid on all lands (BLM, DNRC, private), excluding the Charles M. Russell (CMR) National Wildlife Refuge south of Valentine and Crooked Creek Roads. Increase the quota range from 100 to 500 to 100 to 1200. Increase the quota from 300 to 1000.
- Reduce the quota of the 410-00 Elk B License from 800 to 200, and reduce the lower end of the quota range from 200 to 100.

Modifications to the 2020-21 Montana Deer/Elk Hunting Regulations would read (changes highlighted in **RED**):

Elk Hunting by Drawing Only						
Elk Permit: 410-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	150	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01	
Elk Permit: 410-21	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	1900	Sep 07-Oct 20	-	Only valid in HDs 410 and 417.
Elk B License: 410-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	800 200	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01	
Elk B License: 410-01	Antlerless Elk	June 1	300	Sep 07-Oct 20	-	Only valid in HDs 410 and 417.
Elk B License: 410-02	Antlerless Elk	June 1	300 1000	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Feb 15	Valid only on private and DNRC lands. Not valid on BLM or CMR Refuge. Valid only south of Valentine/Crooked Creek Rds. Not valid on CMR Refuge.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objectives of these proposed changes are to improve elk management in this area. The 410-02 antlerless license was valid for its first year in 2018 with some success (61 antlerless elk harvested, 20% success). The impetus of this license was to provide an additional tool for private landowners to manage elk on their properties, without having additional crowding on public (majority BLM) lands in this district. However, further conversations with landowners makes additional changes to this license necessary. More specifically, the objectives behind this proposed set of season changes are 1) to harvest additional antlerless elk where the highest, more problematic elk densities occur, 2) redistribute elk in this HD to the northern half, where there is more public land, and 3) give landowners more freedom to manage elk on their

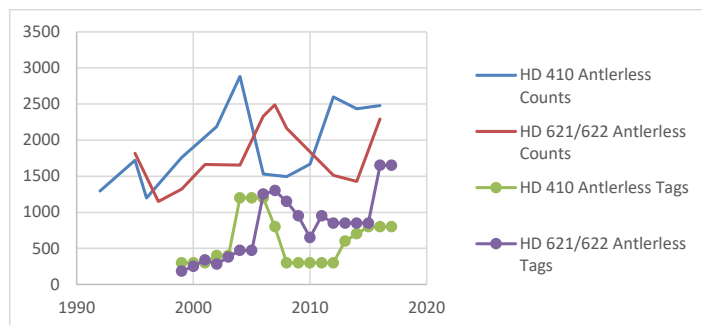
2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

properties, while 4) maintaining the excellent hunt quality that 410-00 cow elk hunters enjoy in this HD.

Hunting district 410 is relatively unique, considering the amount of accessible public lands that contain elk throughout the hunting season. The overall hunting quality in HD 410 is very good, as many of these elk remain accessible to the public during the archery and general hunting seasons. Hunter success on the HD 410 elk B license averages 32% (2004-2018), compared with a 18% average success rate on the Region 4 elk B license (004-00). However, like in many other HDs, changing land uses and values has resulted in some properties in HD 410 harboring elk during the hunting season, resulting in FWP not being able to meet its management objectives.

Elk in HD 410, like other areas, respond to hunting pressure, and simply increasing the number of elk B licenses across the entire district can lead to several unintended consequences, including: 1) elk retreating on to private land “refuge” properties, where limited or no hunting occurs, thereby exacerbating the localized problems with large concentrations of elk, 2) elk may leave HD 410, as what occurred in the 2004 hunting season (Figure 1), and 3) Block Management cooperators who already receive a high level of hunting pressure, and have expressed reluctance over receiving additional hunting pressure, will get more inundated with hunters.

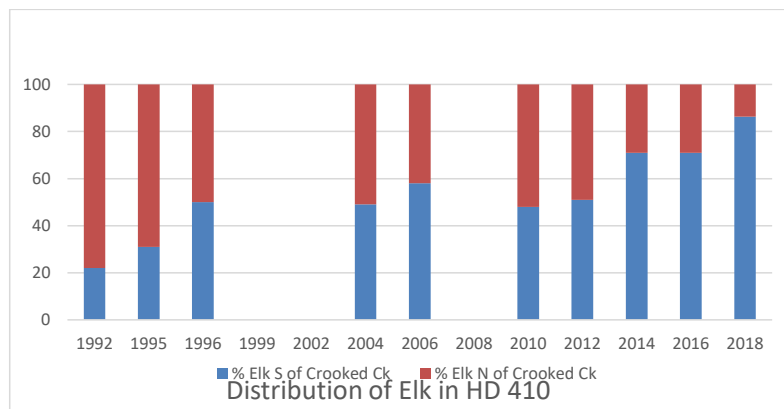
Figure 1. HD 410, 621, and 622 elk license numbers and elk counts. In 2004, the number of licenses in HD 410 increased from 400 to 1200, leading to a significant migration of elk across the Missouri River into Region 6. Region 6 then increased their number of elk B licenses, causing another large migration back into Region 4. While additional elk were harvested during this period, overall elk numbers remained above objective in the Breaks.



2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Elk have historically resided in the northern half of HD 410, but as stated above, with changing land use practices elk have begun expanding and concentrating further south, causing localized game damage complaints and hunter access issues with more checkerboarded private land.

Figure 2. Distribution of elk in HD 410, in relation to north or south of Crooked Creek.



3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The area biologist will measure the success of this proposal several ways:

- Examination of 2020 and 2021 harvest estimates will indicate a measurable amount of antlerless harvest in HD 410 on the various LPTs, during both extended and general seasons, resulting in overall increased antlerless harvest in HD 410,
- Hunters with the 410-00 license will not complain about over-crowding on public lands/some BMAs in HD 410, and may report seeing more elk on public lands/BMAs on the that were pressured off non-BMA lands that the 410-02 license is targeting,
- BMA cooperators will not experience a significant increase in hunter pressure/hunter days on their properties from what they already receive (modifications to certain BM contracts will be necessary),
- The area biologist will observe fewer antlerless elk during biennial aerial elk surveys in HD 410, and a larger proportion of these elk in the northern half of the district, and,
- Over time, fewer elk game damage complaints may occur, and landowners will feel like they are provided adequate tools to achieve desired elk harvest on their properties.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The 2005 Elk Management Plan (EMP) for HD 410 is to maintain 2000 to 2300 elk observed during post-season aerial surveys (approximately 500 to 600 bulls, 450 to 600 calves, and 1100 to 1200 cows). The area biologist flew the last survey in February 2018 and observed 3677 total elk (Table 1). Elk are currently 71% above objective. The next complete-coverage survey of HD 410 will take place this coming winter.

Table 1. Hunting district 410 elk surveys, 1992 to present.

Survey Year	-----Bulls-----			Bull Total	-----Antlerless Elk-----			Total	Calves: 100 Cows	Bulls: 100 Cows
	Spike Bulls	Raghorn Bulls	6x6 Bulls		Calves	Cows	Unclassified Cows/Calves			
1992	195	104	123	422	441	853		1716	52	49
1995	145	107	121	373	480	1240		2093	39	30
1996	237	163	164	564	256	943		1763	27	60
1999	194	196	238	628	559	1202		2389	47	52
2002	249	316	255	820	580	1606		3012	36	51
2004	278	264	231	773	815	2068		3656	39	37
2006	216	228	250	694	513	1019		2226	50	68
2008	192	231	238	661	420	1075		2156	39	61
2010	111	96	224	431	483	1183		2107	41	36
2012	198	200	286	684	528	1508	561	3281	35	45
2014	240	225	383	848	588	1735	113	3284	34	49
2016	358	171	479	1008	674	1805		3487	37	56
2018	304	223	494	1021	870	1786		3677	49	57

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature/precipitation information).

Figure 2 (at the end) illustrates the general elk distribution in HD 410 overlaid with legally-accessible public lands and locations/group sizes from the 2016 and 2018 winter elk surveys, in addition to where the 410-02 license would be valid with boundary roads. Of the ~1 million acres of land in HD 410, elk occupy roughly 65% of the HD. Approximately 451,000 acres, or 45% of

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

HD 410, is legally-accessible public land. Elk occupy an estimated 374,000 acres of these public lands, or 57% of the total elk habitat in HD 410 and 83% of these accessible public lands. Including current BMAs, hunters have a total of almost 460,000 acres of huntable elk habitat in HD 410. To provide comparison, of HD 411's ~820,000 total acres, ~482,000 acres are considered potential elk habitat (58% of the district), but only ~96,000 of these acres (19%) are legally-accessible public lands, and the majority of that is summer range (i.e., elk do not occupy that area during the hunting season).

Given the amount of public hunting opportunity in HD 410, it may be no coincidence that the HD 410 elk B license is the most highly sought-after elk B license in the state, and until recently was the third-most highly sought-after elk LPT overall, when in 2017, 3,204 people applied first-choice for the 800 available licenses. Given the high demand for hunting antlerless elk in HD 410, and the amount of already-available public lands, the more targeted approach afforded by changing of the 410-02 elk B license to be valid on only a portion of HD 410, but across all landownerships, will more likely address the overpopulation and distribution issues of elk in the HD, while maintaining the overall quality experience so many hunters (and landowners) seek. The continuation of the ending season date of February 15 will add to a landowner's repertoire of tools they can use (or set aside) in managing elk on their properties without negatively affecting elk distribution on federal lands.

While summer 2017 experienced severe drought conditions, resulting in lower natural forage availability, some of the private properties grow alternative crops that provide additional and highly attractive, nutritious forage for elk that draws them to these areas during the late summer/fall months and likely further increases over-winter survivorship. Winter 2017-18 was one of the harshest on record for the last few decades, yet elk survival and recruitment remained relatively high.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Much effort from enforcement and wildlife staff has been spent towards improving relationships between landowners, FWP, and the public, and increasing access in some of the isolated "problem" areas of HD 410. Landowners in the district have varying opinions on these elk, from making the district a general season across the board for antlerless only, to harboring bad memories from the perceived "elk slaughter" that occurred when elk B license numbers were at a quota of 1200 in 2004 and 2005. Other landowners have purchased properties in this district, or lease/outfit their properties and wish to see more elk. The common thread among these landowners, particularly those outside of the BMA program, however, is a desire to have greater control of who is eligible to hunt their properties, such as locals, friends, and family members. Given the popularity of the 410-00 license, the license proves difficult for some of these individuals to draw. The intention behind this expansion of the 410-02 license in a portion of HD 410 is to provide these landowners the tool they desire, and to attract applicants who know these landowners or otherwise could gain permission on harder-to-access private lands, while deterring applicants who prefer to hunt public lands and the CMR (i.e., the "regular" 410-00 applicants). At the same time, the 410-02 license could provide hunting pressure on

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

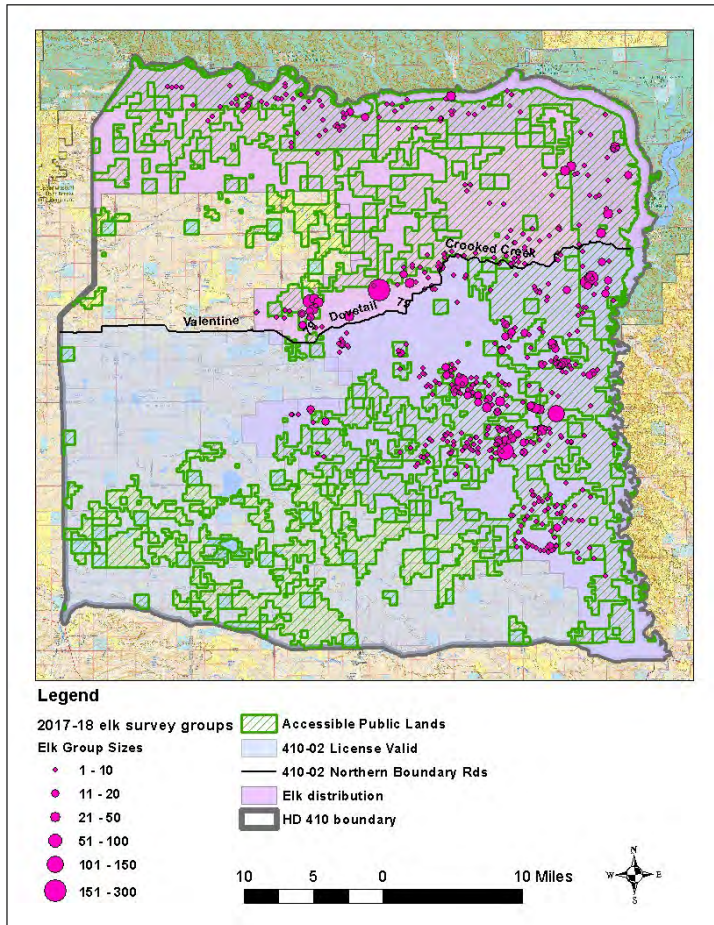
majority private lands in the south half of the district, thereby dispersing elk to public lands where they can be harvested by holders of the 410-00 license.

The BLM biologist out of Lewistown supports this proposal, as does the Lewistown-area game warden and warden sergeant. The area biologist presented this proposal to the Winnett ACES, a landowner group comprised of landowners from this area. They support the proposal, yet harbor some concern over road damage. However, road damage occurs in this area regardless before the advent of general season, and they understand if they want to see additional elk harvest, this is one of the consequences. Several landowners that are known to "harbor" elk have expressed that they will apply and encourage friends/family that have permission to hunt their properties to apply for this license. Finally, CMR staff support this proposal. They would support use of the 410-02 license on CMR lands during the general season, but not during the shoulder season. After discussion, it was decided that for the sake of regulation simplicity, and overall hunt quality on CMR lands, that the 410-02 license would not be valid on CMR, period. This may change if elk groups start congregating on CMR lands, but it is doubtful that this would occur.

Some potential and related problems may occur with this proposal. Without engagement and participation by area private landowners (via application for the 410-02 license and providing hunting access), the 410-02 LPT will be unsuccessful. As mentioned previously, there will likely be more, and concentrated, road traffic in the south half of the district; as a county with a low tax base, area residents may see increased, and persistent road damage.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Figure 2. General elk distribution and accessible public lands in HD 410, overlaid by proposed season change area where 410-02 elk B license would be valid.



Submitted by: Sonja Andersen/October 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 4

Hunting District: 411, 511, 530

Year: 2020-2021

There are several attachments associated with this proposal justification, as follows and provided at the end:

Attachment A: Elk distribution, movements, game damage, and history of the Big Snowy Mountains

Attachment B: Aerial surveys during late summer/fall of the west end Big Snowy Mountains

Attachment C: Shoulder season performance relative to criteria in HDs 411, 511, and 530

1. Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). **REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

For the upcoming 2020-21 hunting seasons:

- Eliminate the hunting district (HD) 411 district split east and west of Red Hill Road, so that 411 regulations are consistent across the entire HD,

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

- In HD 411, make spikes valid on the general elk license during archery/general seasons, as are HDs 511 and 530.
- Increase the quota range of the 411-00 elk B license from 100 to 600 to 100 to 1200, and increase the current quota from 400 to 800. It will be valid on all lands except National Forest lands during the early/dead-week shoulder seasons across all three HDs, but valid on National Forest lands during the archery/general/late shoulder seasons. The latter is consistent with current regulations for HDs 511/530, but an addition to HD 411.
- In 411, for the 004-00 elk B license, make it valid only on private land for the early shoulder season. Once archery season starts, and for dead week, the general season, and late shoulder season, this license will be valid everywhere in HD 411 except National Forest lands, as it is currently.
- In HDs 511 and 530, for the 005-00 elk B license, retain the “valid only on private land” for the early shoulder season. For the archery season, dead week, general, and late shoulder seasons, make it valid everywhere in the HDs except National Forest lands, as it is currently for the archery, general, and late shoulder season. In other words, add a “dead week” shoulder season valid everywhere except National Forest lands on the 005-00 elk B license for HDs 511 and 530.
- For all three HDs, for the general license, make the early and dead week shoulder season valid on private land only, the archery/general seasons valid everywhere, and late shoulder season valid everywhere except National Forest lands.
- Extend the late shoulder season on all license/permit types (LPTs) in HD 411 through February 15.

Modifications to the 2020-21 Montana Deer/Elk Hunting Regulations would read (changes highlighted in **RED**):

HD 411:

Elk						
General Elk License	Spike bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	
	Antlerless Elk				Aug 15-Sep 04 Oct 19-Oct 23	Only valid on private land-west HWY 238
					Aug 15-Sep 04 Nov 30-Feb 15	Only valid east of HWY 238. Not valid on National Forest lands.
					Oct 19-Oct 23 Nov 30-Jan 04 Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands
Elk Permit: 411-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	300	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	Only valid in HDs 411, 511, and 530.
Elk Permit: 900-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	3700	Sep 05-Oct 18	-	First and second choice only. ArchEquip Only. Valid in multiple HDs as listed under each HD.
Elk B License: 411-00 Valid in HD 411 with restrictions. Also valid in 511 and 530.	Antlerless Elk	June 1	400 800	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29 Feb 15	
					Aug 15-Sep 04 Oct 19-Oct 23	Only valid on private land west of HWY 238. Not valid on National Forest lands.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

					Aug 15-Sep 04 Jan 02-Feb 15	Only valid east of HWY 238. Not valid on National Forest lands.
					Oct 19-Oct 23 Nov 30-Jan 04	Not valid on National Forest lands.
					Jan 02-Feb 15	Only valid east of Hwy 238. Not valid on National Forest lands.
Elk B License: 004-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	4,800	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 2419-Jan 04Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge. Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455.
					Aug 15-Sep 04 Jan 02-Feb 15	Only valid east of HWY 238. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge. Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455. Only valid on private land. Valid in Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455 as listed under each HD.
					Aug 15-Sep 04	Only valid on private land west of HWY 238. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge. Valid in all Region 4 HDs except 410 and 455.

HDs 511 and 530:

Elk						
	Spike bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	
General Elk License	Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Aug 15-Sep 04 Oct 19-Oct 23 Nov 30-Feb 15	Only valid on private land. Not valid on National Forest lands.
Elk Permit: 411-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	300	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	Only valid in HDs 411, 511, and 530.
Elk Permit: 900-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	3700	Sep 05-Oct 18	-	First and second choice only. ArchEquip Only. Valid in multiple HDs as listed under each HD.
Elk B License: 411-00 Valid in HD 411 with restrictions. Also valid in 511 and 530.	Antlerless Elk	June 1	499 800	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Feb 15	
				-	Aug 15-Sep 04 Oct 19-Oct 23	Not valid on National Forest lands.
Elk B License: 005-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	1,500	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 2419-Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands. Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD.
				-	Aug 15-Sep 04 Oct 19-Oct 23	Only valid on private land. Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The most important objective is to simplify and make consistent the regulations for the Snowy Elk Management Unit (EMU), especially since while elk may winter in different areas, they still

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

represent one population. Similar season changes are proposed for HD 412 (Judiths and Moccasins), in a separate justification. We provide specific objectives for each proposed change below:

- 1) Spikes valid on a general license in HD 411: Provide additional harvest opportunity for sportsmen in this HD to harvest a spike bull elk without requiring a special permit. Occasionally, hunters encounter only bull groups that also contain spikes, so this proposed change may help increase overall harvest in the HD, without significant biological impacts. Harvesting a spike over a cow will have a lesser impact on population growth, but it still represents an additional elk harvested, and bulls are well over-objective in this EMU. Finally, the disparity between HDs 411 and 511/530 have resulted in hunters mistakenly harvesting spike elk in HD 411 and this proposal will rectify that issue and reduce unintended violations.
- 2) Quota range/quota change for 411-00 elk B license: Landowners in the Snowy Mountain complex have varying levels and tolerances for elk on their properties. Given the status of the Snowy elk population relative to objective, increasing the license quota/quota range will further provide area landowners the tool they need to manage elk on their properties. This license will likely not sell out before the end of the late shoulder season, so it provides opportunity for landowners and sportsmen to utilize it no matter the season timing.
- 3) Retaining BLM/DNRC early shoulder opportunity on 411-00 elk B: Very little harvest occurs during the early shoulder season on this LPT (average 5 elk/year). We anticipate very low early shoulder season participation, particularly on public land, with this license, and it maintains current consistency across all three HDs.
- 4) Retain 411-00 elk B license late shoulder season on USFS lands in HDs 511/530 and add same regulation to HD 411: In instances where high numbers of elk are available for harvest on public land, a limited, elk-B license shoulder season may be utilized to increase harvest and keep elk moving/distributed across an HD. Such an instance has been the case in Region 5. No elk use USFS lands during the late shoulder season in HD 411, but to keep the regulations consistent across the EMU, we are proposing this additional season. Additionally, elk do not spend their entire life-cycle on USFS; if they are on USFS they will end up on private land eventually and thus warrant harvest. This proposal objective removes one more road block for elk harvest in the Snowy EMU. The limited nature of the B-license utilized for this purpose is a compromise between no opportunity and unlimited, general license opportunity.
- 5) Early shoulder season valid for private land only on 004-00, 005-00, and general license: This regulation change is meant to address concerns from archery hunters, particularly in HD 411, who feel that early shoulder season hunting on isolated parcels of BLM/DNRC pressures elk off these areas and on to private lands prior to archery season. Average early shoulder season harvest is generally low (40 elk/year), and occurs predominately on private lands to begin with. However, archery hunters have repeatedly voiced concerns over this issue. We hope this proposal will lend more support for shoulder seasons, particularly early shoulder seasons, if this compromise is acceptable to archery hunters. It also puts more of the onus on private landowners to take advantage of the opportunity to harvest elk on their private lands prior to archery season should they choose to participate.
- 6) Incorporating dead week shoulder season across all antlerless LPTs and HDs: Provides additional harvest opportunity of elk in this over-objective EMU. Dead week will include all lands except National Forest lands on the 004-00/005-00 elk B licenses and 411-00 elk B licenses, but be private land only for the general license, to provide a fairer opportunity for 411-20 elk permit holders to harvest either-sex elk on the Forest and other public lands at the start of general season.
- 7) Eliminate the Red Hill Rd/Hwy 238 district split in HD 411: Elk are over their sub-objectives on both the east and west ends of HD 411, with legitimate impacts to landowners on both "sides" of the

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

boundary. This is one population of elk and needs to be managed as such. See attached documentation (Attachments A, B, and C) for more information related to this element of the proposed season change.

- 8) Extend late shoulder season through Feb 15 across all 3 HDs: Provide private landowners, particularly on the west end of the Big Snowies, the means to manage elk that tend to move down onto the flats and their properties later in the winter, reducing late-season game damage complaints otherwise fielded to FWP staff. Also creates consistency with HDs 511 (also west of Red Hill Road) and 530 shoulder seasons that already currently end February 15.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be measured in several ways. First, there will be less confusion and fewer potential violations of the regulations. Hunters will more easily interpret and follow the regulations for these HDs. Second, relationships between archery hunters and FWP will improve regarding the early shoulder seasons—some archery hunters may still not like them, but there will be less conflict on limited public land parcels that hold elk during the early shoulder/archery seasons. Third, with the emphasis of managing elk on private lands, this proposal puts the onus on private landowners to manage elk on their properties towards objective. Since the advent of shoulder seasons, there have been few to no game damage complaints related to cow elk in the Snowy EMU HDs. This proposal is an attempt to maintain shoulder seasons in this area by striking a balance between sportsman and landowner interests, while continuing to provide additional means to increase elk harvest across this mountain range.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

According to the 2005 Elk Management Plan (EMP), the survey objective for the Big and Little Snowy Mountains is to observe 690-900 elk, comprised of at least 120 (60 brow-tined) bulls. The last complete-coverage survey of the Snowies complex occurred in February-March 2019, when area biologists observed 7204 total elk (1234 bulls, 4021 cows, 1197 calves, 56 unclassified antlerless). Elk are thus 806% above objective overall. More elk reside on the east end of the Little Snowies than the west end of the Big Snowies, with 6594 elk observed in the eastern half of HD 411/HD 530 and 610 elk observed in the western half of HD 411/across HD 511.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

While this elk population continues to grow, growth may be slowing as shoulder season harvest, while not quite meeting harvest criteria, has nonetheless allowed for a significant increase in elk harvest across these three HDs. Prior to shoulder seasons, annual total elk harvest across the Snowies averaged 362 elk/year. Despite not quite exceeding recruitment, average annual harvest has increased to 803 elk/year since shoulder season implementation. Additionally, more than half of the elk are harvested during the archery/general seasons, one of the program's original, and important, intents. Attachment C details shoulder season harvest and criteria further, as it relates to the Snowy EMU.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature/precipitation information).

Elk numbers in the Snowy Mountains have been increasing exponentially since the mid-2000s, mostly related to population expansion and growth on the east end. However, this growth appears to be slowing. While total numbers of elk in the Snowies, particularly the Little Snowies, still grows every year we may be seeing the effects of "limited" habitat at current numbers. Conversely, elk on the west ends of HDs 411/511 have remained relatively steady at ~400 elk since 1991. Habitat limitations (winter snow on the north slope, availability of water and succulent forage) is the primary limiting factor for these elk—despite agricultural activities and a fair amount of protection from hunting, elk have failed to expand significantly in number and distribution. While habitat quality seems to be excellent on the north slope of the Big Snowy Mountains, elk fail to use this area for much of the year, and save an occasional observation (15-75 elk), most of the elk summer and winter on the far west side (Attachments A and B). It is no surprise that elk have fared much better on the east ends of HDs 411 and in HD 530. Large swaths of land in both districts have been effectively closed to hunting for almost the last two decades (there is limited hunting pressure but this has little to no effect on the elk population). These lands also contain abundant food sources, few predators, and elk productivity is high under these circumstances. Shoulder seasons, which began in the 2016 hunting season, have increased the average number of antlerless elk harvested over the last few years.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

We have primarily spoken to landowners on the west end of the Big Snowy Mountains, versus the Little Snowies, as this proposal's success or failure has a more direct impact on them than landowners east of

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Red Hill Road. Numerous landowners on the west end of the Big Snowy Mountains were contacted regarding this proposal. The overwhelming majority supports the proposal, and supports both early and late shoulder seasons to the fullest extent possible. Landowners on the north/west end of HD 411 report seeing relatively few elk (i.e., 10-75) with none to 1-2 harvested/year on their properties. With the exception of maybe one or two, these landowners do not support elk expanding or increasing onto their properties. A full report of these landowner contacts will be provided to the Commission separately, to protect the personal information of these landowners who do not wish to be advertised publicly.

Submitted by: Sonja Andersen & Ashley Taylor/October 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

Attachment A: Summary of elk distribution, movements, game damage, and general history of the Big Snowy Mountains

Elk Winter/Summer ranges primarily west of Red Hill Road:

There are several main elk wintering herds in the Snowies that comprise the overall population. The elk that winter on the west end of the Big Snowy Mountains are the most stable in terms of numbers and habitat use patterns. Three different “groups” of elk summer and/or winter west of Red Hill Road. Despite being parts of different herds, these elk comprise one population such that portions intermingle and integrate seasonally. In 2025/2026, Snowy elk are scheduled to be captured and collared to obtain more information about distribution, movements, and habitat use. Until that time, or until a re-write of the Elk Management Plan (EMP), it is in the best interest of the resource, the public, and area landowners, that these elk are managed as one population.

The “West End” herd consists of 300 to >500 elk that winter primarily on the Three Bar Ranch and adjacent private lands on the far west end of the Big Snowies (Figure 1). These elk have been relatively constant in their numbers throughout a variety of season-types, regulations, and access levels. Most of these elk use this area as year-round habitat, calving and summering here, although a small number (e.g., 10-75) calve and summer on the north/west slopes of HD 411, and another portion (e.g., 50-150) calve and summer in HD 511. The Three Bar Ranch manager typically observes 200-300 head of cows and calves in large nursery groups throughout the summer. Conversations with other landowners on the west end of HD 411 indicate occasional sightings of elk. These “transient” elk (10-75) use some of the

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available habitat in the Cottonwood Creek/Beaver Creek drainages on the north end of the Big Snowy Mountains, but are generally gone (presumably move west to join main herd) with the first snowfall or archery season pressure. Additionally, elk summer in HD 511 in relatively stable numbers of 50-150 head between Neil and Swimming Woman Creeks. These cows and calves likely move west and join the “West end” herd.

Some elk summer, calve, and spend a portion of the fall (typically archery/early general season) on the east end of the Big Snowies, in both HDs 411 and 511. Approximately 100-300 of these “Red Hill Road” elk use National Forest/BLM/private lands adjacent to Red Hill Road, occupying habitat both *east* and *west* of the road. This area is relatively steep, dry country. The “dry” description is important; there isn’t much for perennial water except on private lands *east* of Red Hill Road, and these elk make regular movements down to private land and back up onto the USFS land. In other words, they regularly cross back and forth across Red Hill Road which is why Red Hill Road is not an appropriate splitting point for dividing a district. As archery season progresses, they get pressured, vegetation continues to senesce, and they continue their downward/eastward movement and winter in the foothill areas of the Little Snowies in HDs 411/530 (Figure 2). How long they stay up west of Red Hill Road is determined by forage conditions, snow, and hunting pressure.

Game Damage:

Few game damage complaints (except from bull elk) have occurred since the advent of shoulder seasons in 2016. The elk that winter on the west end of the Big Snowies normally stay on these lands throughout late fall/early winter. Occasionally hunter pressure pushes these elk further west, sometimes across Hwy 191, where there is a general regulation for both antlerless and either-sex elk. In addition, there are considerable acreages of publicly-accessible lands (DNRC, Block Management, other private lands open for hunting). Under these circumstances during the hunting season, elk shootouts and the unfortunate consequences (violations, wounded elk, frustrated landowners, etc.) often occur. When elk move down to the flats and/or cross Hwy 191 after the hunting season, they cause considerable game damage to landowners in HDs 411 and 418, some of whom have unprotected haystacks, winter wheat fields, and pasture lands. These elk have been more apt to cross the highway or cause game damage complaints when their numbers approach/exceed 400. Most of the game damage complaints that have occurred in the last three years have centered upon bull elk damaging haystacks. These complaints, where landowners are eligible for game damage assistance, have received temporary elk fence and/or permanent stackyard materials.

The transient elk that summer/fall on the northwest side of HD 411 generally end up with the large herd of elk on the west end of the Big Snowies during winter and typical “game damage” season. These elk have not caused any official game damage complaints during other times of year, but most landowners in this area have strongly encouraged the department to not let this population expand or grow, due to concerns for such.

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Elk in the west end of HD 511 cause game damage issues for landowners with hayfields and haystacks along the foothills of the National Forest land from Neil Creek to Swimming Woman Creek. The Harlowton biologist has heard reports of 75 to 100 (mostly bull) elk damaging haystacks since winter of 2014-2015 (January-March) in this area. Beginning in 2015, the biologist has responded to game damage reports from cow/calf groups of 50-100 elk on the west side of HD 511 (mainly late summer/early fall). Since the start of early shoulder seasons, these landowners have successfully managed this “early season” game damage themselves, and want to continue to do so.

While most of the elk habitat in HDs 411, 511, and 530 is on the east end of HD 411 and in HD 530, most of the game damage complaints from HD 411 occur on the west end. Game damage complaints in the past ensued when there were as few as 250-300 elk on the west end of the Snowies. Since 1991, there are at least 36 elk-related game damage complaints from the west end of HD 411 (not including complaints from HD 418 after elk cross the highway), versus 23 from the east end of HD 411. Since 2015 (advent of the game damage database), there have been four elk game damage complaints in HD 511. There are no formal game damage complaints from landowners in 530 in the foothills of the Little Snowy Mountains. In the Snowy Mountain portion of HD530 game damage is occurring but many landowners do not qualify for game damage assistance, or are using the early and late shoulder season to manage the elk game damage themselves.

Snowy Elk Hunting Seasons and Access

Prior to the 1992 hunting season, the Big and Little Snowy Mountains were two separate permit areas made up of 3 hunting districts: 411, 511, and 530. Beginning in 1992, one batch of permits were issued (application under HD 411) to be valid on all three HDs. The three HDs were combined after considerable thought from the previous biologists, Tom Stivers and Jay Newell, for the following reasons:

- 1) Most of the elk habitat and most of the elk spent most of their time in HD 411, and regularly crossed back and forth between Regions 4 and 5,
- 2) The application process at the time and usage of elk permits was too confusing and restrictive, inhibiting opportunity and harvest,
- 3) Neither biologist wanted to “play into the landowner’s hands,” offering permits for a district that could possibly only be used on certain individuals’ properties,
- 4) Increased permits and increased hunting area increases local hunter participation, knowledge, and success, and
- 5) Increased permits increase a landowner’s chances of drawing.

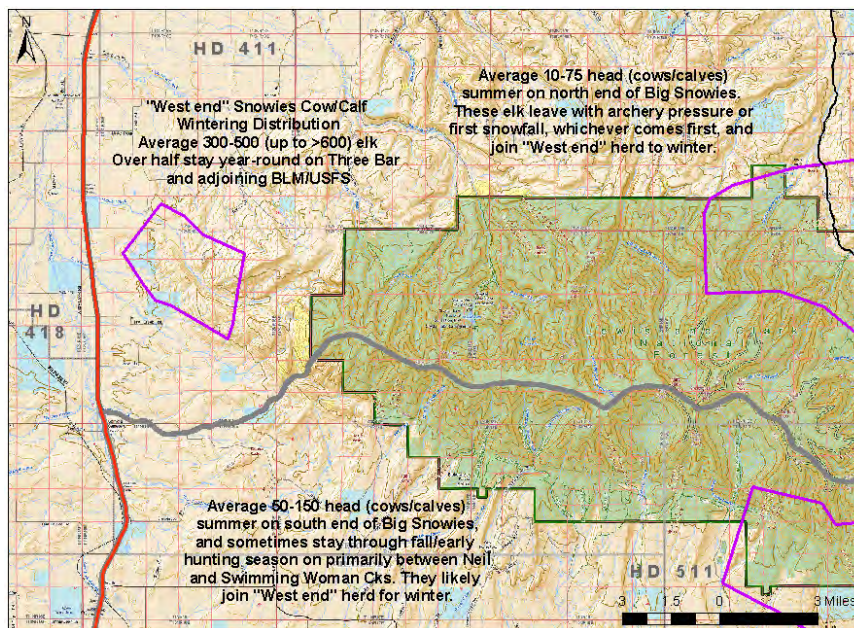
Tactics to increase antlerless elk harvest have since been employed (e.g., lengthening the antlerless elk season, either by starting it *prior to the general season* (overlapping the archery season) or extending it past the general season, a boundary change, and several quota changes. Archery hunting has always been liberal in the Snowy EMU, whereas the general season rifle permits have been much more limited. Varying numbers of antlerless permits and 2nd antlerless elk licenses have been available and increasing

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with increasing elk numbers, and by 2006, antlerless elk harvest was legal on a general elk license with additional B-license opportunities.

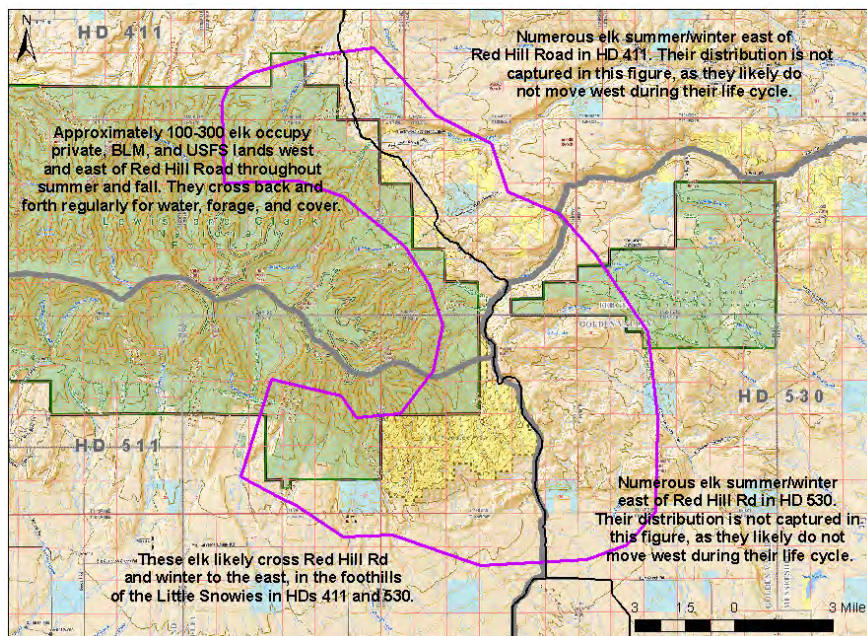
Throughout all this time, with a “liberal” season on elk in HDs 411, 511, and 530, the west-end elk have not declined dramatically and the east end elk have continued to increase. The relative security provided on the west end via private landowners will continue to ensure that, even with a shoulder season, these elk would not be “driven to extinction.” The Three Bar Ranch, the ranch on which most of these elk reside, allows up to two parties of two-three people five days per week through the general hunting season. Neighboring ranches also allow varying degrees of access. Several neighbors to the north allow restricted access. These elk are by no means “protected,” or “harbored,” but they continue to persist and even increase.

Figure 1. Winter distribution of elk that summer on the west end of the Big Snowy Mountains. Most of these elk overlap summer/winter range.



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Figure 2. Summer/fall distribution of elk that reside west of Red Hill Road on the east end of the Big Snowies. These elk cross Red Hill Road regularly. Only bulls stay in this general area (south side HD 511) during the winter; remaining cows and calves, with some bulls, move east and winter in HDs 411 or 530.



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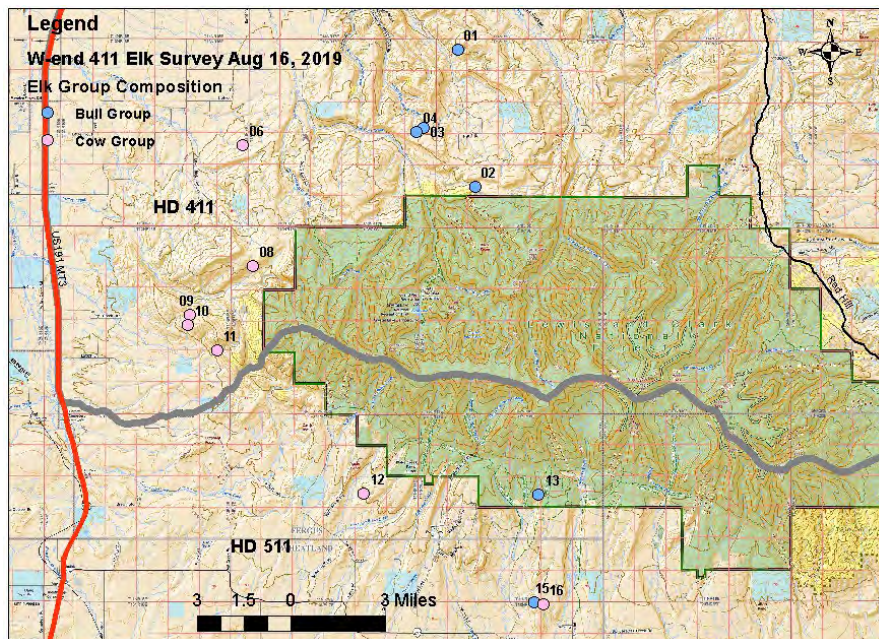
Attachment B: Aerial Elk Surveys of the western Big Snowy Mountains, 2019

On the mornings of August 16, and October 21, 2019, Lewistown-area biologist Sonja Andersen and pilot Greg Smith flew the western portion of the Big Snowy Mountains. Survey objectives were to locate groups of cows, however bull observations were also recorded. Confirming cow group locations would help indicate whether larger groups of elk were present, primarily on the north slopes of the Big Snowy Mountains in HD 411, to be harvested in a disproportionate amount to the remainder of elk range.

On the first (August) flight, we observed 349 total elk (48 bulls, 311 unclassified antlerless; Figure 1 and Table 1). Except for 3 cows with calves (waypoint 06), all antlerless elk were on the far western end of the Big Snowies, primarily on the Three Bar Ranch, as per their normal distribution and described in Attachment A. Another handful of cows and calves were observed in HD 511, but they were largely in the timber by that time of morning. Landowners in HD 511 had reported to Ashley Taylor roughly 60-100 antlerless elk between two properties, which were missed on this survey. Given the early morning timespan spent on the north slope, and the number of bulls observed, it is not likely we missed significant numbers of cows or calves in HD 411 during this survey.

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Figure 1. Aerial survey groups of elk in the western Big Snowy Mountains, HDs 411 and 511, on the morning of August 16, 2019.



2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 1. Elk group classifications of elk in the western Big Snowy Mountains, HDs 411 and 511, on the morning of August 16, 2019.

Waypoint	Latitude	Longitude	Total	Adult Bull	Yearling Bull	Unclassified Antlerless
01	46.920159	-109.486563	2	2	0	0
02	46.856421	-109.474994	2	2	0	0
03	46.883787	-109.509607	4	4	0	0
04	46.882056	-109.514463	3	3	0	0
06	46.875435	-109.631714	6	0	0	6
08	46.819760	-109.624867	84	2	2	80
09	46.797254	-109.667108	75	2	2	71
10	46.792317	-109.668550	10	0	1	9
11	46.780526	-109.648909	112	0	1	111
12	46.714429	-109.550131	35	2	6	27
13	46.713983	-109.432412	2	2	0	0
15	46.663891	-109.435430	4	3	0	1
16	46.663030	-109.429165	10	0	4	6
Totals (13 Groups):			349	22	16	311

On the second flight (October), we observed 568 total elk (95 bulls, 473 unclassified antlerless; Figure 2 and Table 2). All the elk were observed in HD 411, and the cows were all on the far west end: Three Bar Ranch and a state section north of Block Management, trailing back up in a long line towards Garneill Point (on Three Bar Ranch). There was an ongoing early (dead-week) shoulder season but no vehicles observed at the Block Management parking.

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Figure 2. Aerial survey groups of elk in the western Big Snowy Mountains, HDs 411 and 511, on the morning of October 21, 2019.

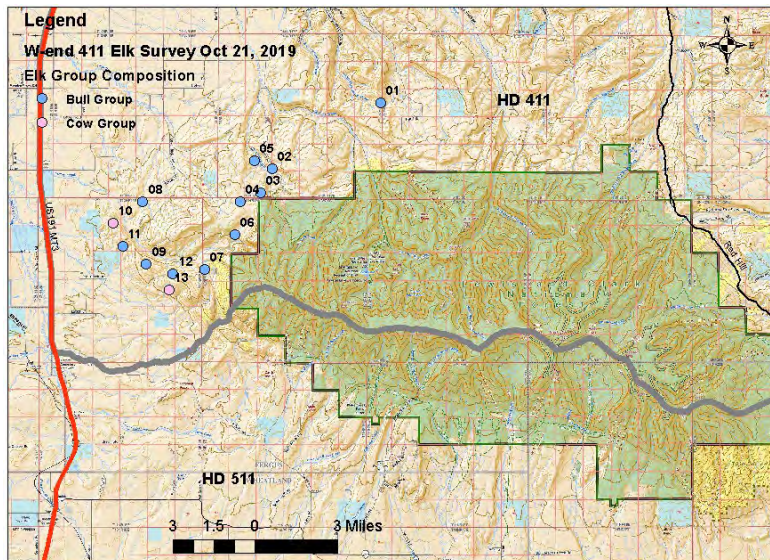


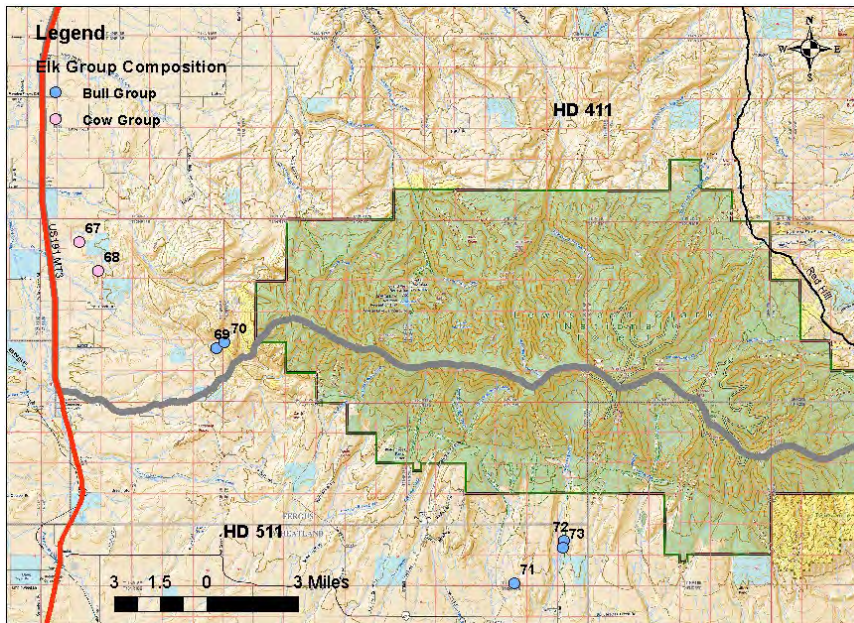
Table 2. Elk group classifications of elk in the western Big Snowy Mountains, HDs 411 and 511, on the morning of October 21, 2019.

Waypoint	Latitude	Longitude	Total	Adult Bull	Raghorn	Yearling Bull	Unclassified Antlerless
01	46.888487	-109.486563	7	2	5	0	0
02	46.853598	-109.474994	5	2	3	0	0
03	46.841099	-109.509607	4	2	2	0	0
04	46.836063	-109.514463	7	6	1	0	0
05	46.857760	-109.631714	1	0	1	0	0
06	46.818505	-109.624867	2	1	1	0	0
07	46.800331	-109.667108	1	1	0	0	0
08	46.836048	-109.668550	3	1	2	0	0
09	46.803322	-109.648909	2	0	0	2	0
10	46.824678	-109.550131	369	9	5	11	344
11	46.812663	-109.432412	1	1	0	0	0
12	46.798029	-109.435430	23	6	12	5	0
13	46.789537	-109.429165	143	0	4	10	129
Totals (14 Groups):			568	30	37	28	473

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To compare with winter survey data, I've also attached a map and table from the 2019 survey of this same area (Figure 3 and Table 3).

Figure 3. Elk group classifications of elk in the western Big Snowy Mountains, HDs 411 and 511, during the annual winter elk survey January/March 2019.



During this last winter survey, elk were in their typical locations—the larger cow/calf groups on and around Three Bar Ranch, with scattered bull groups to the south and further around the south-side of HD 511.

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Table 3. Waypoint and age/sex class information for elk groups observed during the winter elk survey on the west ends of HDs 411/511 (West Big Snowy Mountains), January/March 2019.

Waypoint	Latitude	Longitude	Total	6x6 Bull	Raghorn Bull	Yrlg. Bull	Cows	Calves
67	46.826966	-109.739727	453	0	0	21	278	154
68	46.813449	-109.726374	85	0	1	8	59	17
69	46.776959	-109.644893	14	8	5	1	0	0
70	46.779497	-109.638970	8	5	2	1	0	0
71	46.665412	-109.439685	10	10	0	0	0	0
72	46.685417	-109.405332	1	0	0	1	0	0
73	46.682443	-109.405841	9	9	0	0	0	0
Totals (7 Groups):			580	32	8	32	337	171

These additional survey efforts enforced a lot of what we already know about elk on the west end of the Big Snowy Mountains. Most antlerless elk reside on the far west end, with occasional observations of smaller cow/calf groups around the north side, and an emergent resident group of cows/calves on the south side in HD 511. Liberal hunting seasons in HDs 411/511, including shoulder seasons, will likely continue to have minimal impact on these elk, yet provide landowners the tools they need should they wish to harvest elk on their properties, and isolated public lands, no matter the season timing.

Attachment C: Recruitment Estimations and Shoulder Season Evaluations for the Snowy Mountains portion of the Snowy EMU (HDs 411, 511, and 530)

Recruitment data based on the following assumptions: When “unclassified all” elk were observed, we assumed the average number of spikes:100 antlerless elk as 5.43. This is based on the average number of spikes observed in groups of antlerless elk during east HD 411 surveys (including all spikes observed during the survey would skew data towards bulls, as generally more bull groups are classified completely than cow/calf groups, based on sheer size). This estimate also matches well with what other biologists and literature suggests; 5:100.

For all three years, when there were “unclassified all” observed during a survey, we assumed the ~5% yearling bull component to then determine “unclassified antlerless.” These “unclassified antlerless” would then be calculated against the observed calf:cow ratio to estimate the total number of calves.

Sightability of antlerless elk thought to be very good. Area biologists make every attempt to fly winter elk surveys during cold, calm conditions with a fresh, relatively deep blanket of snow. This results in elk generally being out in the open, and elk not in the open can be found by following tracks. Biologists’ generally assume they miss more bulls during these surveys than cows and calves, since antlerless elk congregate in larger groups this time of year and are more difficult to miss, especially during ideal flying

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conditions. Therefore, we assume sightability of antlerless elk to be 95% for these surveys, but this number changes year to year depending upon survey conditions.

Next is to estimate calf survival (recruitment) from February to spring. Calves aren't yet "recruited" into the population until May or June, when they officially become yearlings. Given the lack of a strong predator component on elk winter range, no elk hunting after February 15, and the propensity/abundance of alternative food sources available throughout the year (agricultural crops, food plots, etc.), calf survival beyond February could also be 95%, if not higher. Data from Kelly Proffitt's elk research in areas where elk likely experience higher overall mortality ranges from 90-95%. In years with harder winters (i.e., 2018 and 2019), we used 90% survivorship. Finally, a ratio of 40 bulls:60 cows is widely accepted among calf crops, so we assign these values to the total recruited number to estimate cow calf and bull calf recruitment separately.

An example: For HDs 511/530 in 2016, Ashley observed 2868 "unclassified all." Using the 5.43:100 ratio, we have 5 % yearling bulls, or 143 yearling bulls and 2725 unclassified antlerless elk. This of course ignores the real possibility of brow-tined bulls in these groups, but they are either counted outside of this number, or occur in relatively low amounts in these larger cow/calf groups. The end result is an err on the side of higher recruitment, as there would be more calves ultimately estimated to produce recruitment levels.

Generally, we are able to get a fairly good calf:cow ratio from east HD 411 data, as these elk are not in the same, huge congregations that exist in HD 530. In 2016, we observed a calf:cow ratio of 27:100. Applying that to the total unclassified antlerless elk (140 in HDs E 511/530, 39 in HD E 411, 56 in W HDs 411/511, and 2725 calculated from "unclassified all" above = 2960 total unclassified antlerless) yields: 27 calves + 100 cows = 127, where roughly 21.3% are calves. Of the 2960 unclassified antlerless, roughly 630 are calves. Additionally, 311 calves were classified, bringing the total observed estimate to 941 calves.

With 95% sight ability, we estimate 991 total calves. With 95% survival beyond February, we estimate a total of 941 calf elk recruited into the Snowy population, and with the 40:60 ratio, 376 bull calves and 615 cow calves were recruited in 2016, and thus needed to be harvested during the 2016 archery, general, and shoulder seasons to meet criteria. Recruitment data for 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 are provided in the following Table 1. Table 2 shows cow and bull elk harvest and timing of harvest (early shoulder, archery/general, late shoulder) in the Snowy Mountains from 2012-2018.

Shoulder season harvest criteria are, during the past 3 years,

The number of each, 1) bulls and 2) cows, harvested during the archery-only and 5-week general seasons (not including shoulder seasons) is more than half the number of each, bulls and cows, recruited during that 3-year period, 3) the total harvest of cows during all seasons combined

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(including shoulder seasons) is greater than the total number of cows recruited during that 3-year period, 4) the total harvest of all elk during all seasons combined is greater than total recruitment for that 3-year period.

Two exceptions to these criteria exist. One, if harvest criteria have not been met due to clear and widely accepted extenuating circumstances, the shoulder season may be continued as long as access to elk during the general season is not considered to be the main reason harvest criteria are not being met. Alternatively, other shoulder seasons not subject to the above harvest criteria are allowed if they are consistent with the fundamental objectives and have broad, expressed support from landowners, sportsmen, FWP, and the Commission.

Table 1. Elk recruitment in the Big and Little Snowy Mountains, 2016-2019. This is the minimum number of cows and bulls that need to be harvested in a given license year to meet shoulder season criteria.

Year	Recruitment			50% of Recruitment	
	Total	Bull	Cow	Bull	Cow
2016	941	376	615	188	308
2017	1520	608	912	304	456
2018	2158	863	1295	432	648
2019	1813	725	1088	363	544

Table 2. Cow and bull elk harvest and timing of harvest (early shoulder, archery/general, late shoulder) in the Snowy Mountains from 2012-2018.

Year	All Season(s)			Early Shoulder			Archery/General			Late Shoulder		
	Calf/Cow	Bull	Total	Calf/Cow	Bull	Total	Calf/Cow	Bull	Total	Calf/Cow	Bull	Total
2012	23/206	205	434				23/206	205	434			
2013	16/188	201	405				16/188	201	405			
2014	28/199	197	424				28/199	197	424			
2015	26/195	213	434				26/195	213	434			
2016	40/414	262	716	5/49	0	54	18/235	261	514	17/127	0	144
2017	35/528	290	853	3/31	2	36	26/368	285	679	6/127	2	135
2018	37/527	277	841	0/31	0	31	27/269	269	565	10/227	6	243

Going by shoulder season criteria, criteria #1 and #2 require that in 2016, 188 bulls and 308 cows were harvested during the archery/general seasons, in 2017, 304 bulls and 456 cows were harvested during the archery and general rifle seasons, and in 2018, 432 bulls and 648 cows were harvested during the archery and general rifle seasons. Criteria #1 was met once, in 2016. The remaining criteria #1 and #2 were not met. Criteria #3 and #4 require that in 2016, 615 cows and 941 total elk were harvested, in 2017, 912 cows and 1520 total elk were harvested, and in 2018, 1088 cows and 1813 total elk were harvested. None of these criteria were met.

However, before it is determined that shoulder seasons are a failure in the Snowy EMU, we would like to point out a few considerations. For instance, average annual cow, bull, and total harvest prior to

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shoulder seasons was 202, 204, and 424 elk, respectively. Annual cow, bull, and total harvest have increased substantially since the advent of shoulder seasons, including a marked increase in harvest during the archery and general seasons. Additionally, all legal bull harvest and over half of the cow harvest occurs during the archery and general seasons.

Access to elk during both the archery and general seasons continues to be an issue in the Snowy complex. Relatively few landowners control most of the access to elk in this EMU, and for the most part they have a high tolerance for a large elk population. That being said, area biologists and wardens are continually working with these landowners to increase access, at least for cow elk hunting, on these properties, and the fruits of this labor are beginning to grow. Additionally, numerous other landowners across this EMU have a low tolerance for elk, but may only have the opportunity to harvest elk on their properties during commission-established early/late shoulder seasons. On average, establishment of a game damage hunt or management season takes 3-7 days before hunters receive their letters and/or can take time off work to show up. Maintaining and/or expanding the shoulder seasons as proposed in HDs 411, 511, and 530 provides these landowners an additional tool they can immediately use to manage an elk problem on their properties. Most of the landowners in HDs 411, 511, and 530 support shoulder seasons in the Snowies. Most local sportsmen, outside of archery hunters, also support and try to participate in shoulder season hunting opportunities. Our goal with the current season proposal is to end the conflict between early shoulder season/archery hunting opportunities and thus gain additional (albeit possibly reluctant) support for shoulder seasons from archers.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 4

Hunting District: 412

Year: 2020-2021

1. Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). **REMEMBER THIS STEP**

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IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.

For the upcoming 2020-21 hunting seasons:

- Increase the quota range on the 412-20 elk permit from 25 to 100 to 25 to 200. Increase the quota on the 412-20 elk permit from 85 to 120.
- For the early shoulder season, make the 004-00 elk B and general licenses valid only on private land. For the dead week shoulder season, make the general license valid only on private land.
- Make spikes valid on the general elk license during archery/general seasons, as are HDs 511 and 530 and proposed for HD 411.

Modifications to the 2020-21 Montana Deer/Elk Hunting Regulations would read (changes highlighted in **RED**):

Elk						
General Elk License	Spike bull or Antlerless Elk	-	-	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	
	Antlerless Elk	-	-	Sep 05-Oct 18	Aug 15-Sep 04 Oct 19-Feb 15 Oct 23	Only valid on private land
					Oct 19 Oct 24-Feb 15	
Elk Permit: 412-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	85 120	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	
Elk Permit: 900-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	3700	Sep 05-Oct 18	-	First and second choice only. ArchEquip Valid in multiple HDs as listed under each HD.
Elk B License: 004-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	4,800	Sep 05-Oct 18	Aug 15-Sep 04	Only valid on private land
					Aug 15-Sep 04 Oct 19-Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge. Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The overarching objectives of this proposed change are to have consistency across the entire Snowy EMU, maintain the ability for landowners to manage elk on their properties during early, archery, general, and late shoulder seasons, put the onus on private landowners to help bring elk numbers towards objective, and finally, provide additional harvest opportunity for spike bull elk without requiring a special permit.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be measured in several ways. First, there will be less confusion and fewer potential violations of the regulations. Hunters will more easily interpret and follow the regulations for these HDs. Second, relationships between archery hunters and FWP will improve regarding the early shoulder seasons—some archery hunters may still not like them, but there will be less conflict on limited public land parcels that hold elk during the early shoulder/archery seasons. Third, with the emphasis of managing elk on private lands, this proposal puts the onus on private landowners to manage elk on their properties towards objective. Since the advent of shoulder seasons, there have been few to no game damage complaints related to cow elk in the Snowy EMU HDs. This proposal is an attempt to maintain shoulder seasons in this area by striking a balance between sportsman and landowner interests, while continuing to provide additional means to increase elk harvest across this mountain range.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The survey objective for HD 412 is to observe 300 elk post-season (including 45 bulls of which 50% are brow-tined) as determined by the 2005 Elk Management Plan (EMP). In February 2019, we observed 528 total elk (309 bulls, 161 cows, 60 cows). With shoulder season pressure, more cows/calves had been likely pushed out of the district and were not counted, which would bring the total even higher. Our winter 2018-19 elk count (as observed) indicates that elk in HD 412 are 76% above objective, particularly the bull component, which comprised roughly 59% of the total elk observed and 587% over the EMP's suggested number.

Table 1 shows elk harvest by sex/season since 2013, including the 2016-2018 shoulder seasons. To harvest 2018 recruitment, 54 bulls and 80 cows needed to be harvested. Over half the number of bulls and cows recruited were harvested during the archery/general seasons. Secondly, the total number of cows harvested and total elk harvested exceeded recruitment. Thus, shoulder season criteria are being met.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 1. Elk harvest in HD 412 by sex and season, 2013-2018.

Season	HD 412					Archery/General			Shoulder Season			
	Calf	Cow	Sum	Antlerless	Bull	Total	Cow	Bull	Total	Cow	Bull	Total
2013	9	108		117	53	170	108	53	170	n/a	n/a	n/a
2014	17	132		149	79	228	132	79	228	n/a	n/a	n/a
2015	18	137		155	52	207	137	52	207	n/a	n/a	n/a
2016	6	108		114	64	178	57	64	127	51	0	51
2017	14	148		162	63	225	107	61	173	41	2	52
2018	6	127		133	72	206	62	72	140	66	0	66

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature/precipitation information).

Most elk in this district spend their life cycle on private land. A relatively small proportion occurs on BLM lands in the North and South Moccasins and Judiths/Black Butte seasonally. Access to hunt these private lands is variable, and generally limited during the early shoulder season. Nonetheless, several landowners have had chronic, early game damage complaints in the past so maintaining an early shoulder season on private land only gives them a tool to manage this problem. After the archery season, landowners typically allow hunting access for cows; access for bulls has historically been limited but has increased in recent years due to increased bull-related game damage complaints. Last year, more cows were harvested during the shoulder seasons than during the archery/general season. This situation will need to be monitored since shoulder seasons are meant to supplement, not replace, general season harvest.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Local archery hunters, while still having disdain for early shoulder seasons, are amenable to this proposal as it removes all public land hunting before the archery season. For HD 412, having isolated groups of elk on public land during the early shoulder season would be relatively rare, as the best elk habitat occurs on private lands. Landowners in this district are well-aware of the elk issue and what is required to bring this population down.

Submitted by: **Sonja Andersen/October 2019**

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 4

Hunting District: 417

Year: 2020-2021

1. Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). **REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

For the upcoming 2020-21 hunting seasons:

- Change the general and 004-00 Elk B License to only be valid south of D-Y Trail and Knox Ridge Road. Add a late shoulder season valid through February 15.
- Create a new license/permit type (LPT) valid across the entire hunting district (HD) for antlerless elk, with a quota range of 50-500 and a quota of 100. This LPT will only be valid during the archery and general seasons.

Modifications to the 2020-21 Montana Deer/Elk Hunting Regulations would read (changes highlighted in **RED**):

Elk						
General Elk License	Antlerless Elk	-	-	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29 Feb 15	Only valid south of D-Y Trail and Knox Ridge Rd.
Elk Permit: 410-21	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	1900	Sep 05-Oct 18	-	Only valid in HDs 410 and 417.
Elk Permit: 417-20	Either-sex Elk	Mar 15	100	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	
Elk B License: 410-01	Antlerless Elk	June 1	300	Sep 05-Oct 18	-	Only valid in HDs 410 and 417.
Elk B License: 417-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	100	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29	

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Elk B License: 004-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	4,800	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24- Nov-29 Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge. Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455. Only valid south of D-Y Trail and Knox Ridge Rd.
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Prior to the 2014-2015 hunting seasons, hunting district (HD) 417 antlerless elk opportunity existed through two license/permit types (LPTs): 417-80, valid throughout the entire district, and 417-81, valid only south of D-Y Trail/Knox Ridge Road. With increasing elk numbers and decreasing access in HD 417, the Department liberalized elk hunting by making antlerless harvest possible on a general elk license and the 004-80/004-00 antlerless elk license, while eliminating both HD-specific LPTs.

This change was meant to provide more opportunistic elk harvest when landowners bordering a larger “refuge” property had elk come on to their lands later in the season. (Because of limited access in HD 417, the 417 B-license valid in the south half of the HD was undersold and underused. A side benefit of replacing it with general/004-00 elk B license was providing more flexibility to hunters who couldn’t find access in this district). Instead, the northern portion of the district, with more public lands but fewer elk, has seen increased hunter pressure and as a result, fewer elk reside here where there are more public lands. FWP has received some public comments by sportsmen concerned about putting too much pressure on these elk in the northern-half of the district.

This proposal is an attempt to combine the positive aspects of both season histories (i.e., HD-specific licenses with a split district vs. 004-00/general opportunity), by still providing the liberal season structure and flexibility of the 004-00/general licenses in the portion of the district that is majority private land with the highest elk concentrations, while improving the hunt quality and encouraging elk to move back to their more historic range in the northern portion of the district.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objectives of these proposed changes are to improve elk management in this area by maintaining the current flexibility landowners in the south half of the district have, in order to manage elk on their properties, but attempt to increase and encourage elk back to the northern portion of the district, in which elk habitat is largely public (BLM) land.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Implementing a shoulder season on the general and 004-00 elk B license will ensure programmatic consistency in the Wildlife Division for HDs that are over objective, while providing landowners an extra tool to manage elk on their properties. The district split, and "protection" of elk in the northern half of the district, will maintain the integrity of the elk population and hunting experience the Missouri Breaks are famous for.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The area biologist will measure the success of this proposal several ways:

- Examination of 2020 and 2021 harvest estimates will indicate a measurable amount of antlerless harvest in HD 417 on the various LPTs, during both shoulder and general seasons, resulting in overall increased antlerless harvest in HD 417,
 - Hunters with the 417-00 license will not complain about over-crowding on public lands, and may report seeing more elk on public lands that were pressured off private lands that the general and 004-00 licenses are now targeting,
 - The area biologist will observe fewer antlerless elk during biennial aerial elk surveys in HD 417, and a larger proportion of these elk in the northern half of the district, and,
 - Over time, fewer elk game damage complaints may occur, and landowners will feel like they are still provided adequate tools to achieve desired elk harvest on their properties.
- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The survey objective for HD 417 is to observe 350 to 400 elk post-season and maintain a ratio of 30 bulls:100 cows as determined by the 2005 Elk Management Plan (EMP). During the last survey (February 2019), the area biologist observed 1,970 total elk (525% above objective) with a bull:cow ratio of 62:100.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature/precipitation information).

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

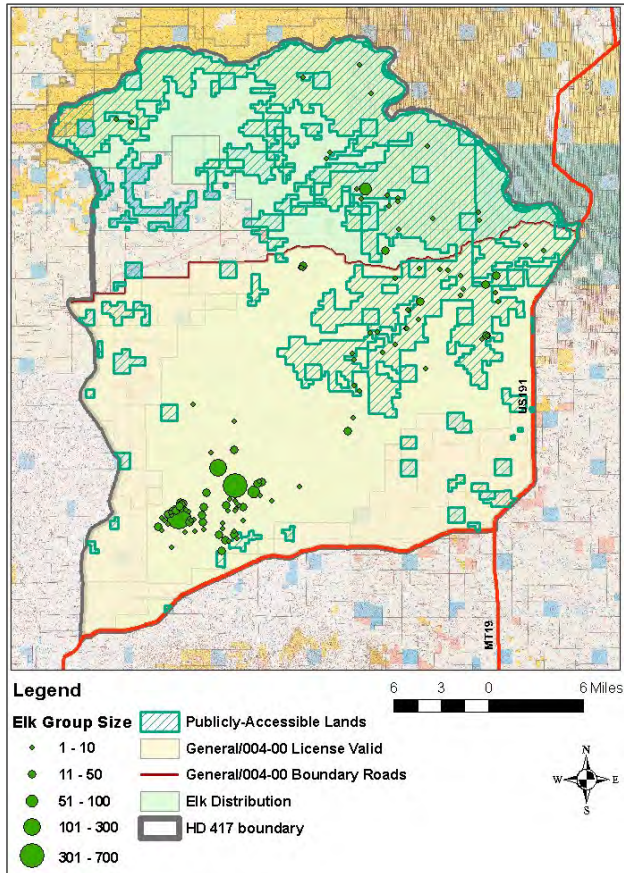
Most elk reside in the southern portion of the district, predominantly private land (Figure 1). These elk get limited hunting pressure on several properties that also contain abundant agricultural forage resources. Later, after the general season, they will move onto more traditional ranches that cannot tolerate these large elk concentrations. The northern portion of the district has majority public land. When general/004-00 licenses were initiated in HD 417, there was suddenly a disproportionate amount of hunting pressure in the northern half of the district. Hunters who previously had to draw a limited license to hunt the Missouri Breaks now had relative free rein in one of the districts, and this pressure, in addition to the relative security and abundance of forage on southern private lands likely exacerbated the redistribution of elk to those areas.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Contacts with landowners affected by this proposal are ongoing. One of the landowners that has high concentrations of elk on his property in the southern portion of the district is willing to allow additional hunting on his property for cow elk during the general AND shoulder season. If this occurs, redistribution of these large concentrations will occur and elk will also be more available for harvest on adjacent properties. Landowners in the northern portion of the district may not like that they have to again draw to hunt antlerless elk on their properties, but landowner preference is a tool they may utilize to increase their chances of drawing. One landowner, enrolled in Block Management, in the northern portion of this district agrees with the proposal. This proposal is a response to sportsman concerns during the 2016-17 season-setting, where a shoulder season was proposed across the entire HD. They did not like that proposal due to lack of protections to elk in the northern portion. This proposal rectifies that.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Figure 1. General elk distribution and accessible public lands in HD 417, overlaid by proposed season change area where 004-00 elk B/general licenses would be valid.



Submitted by: Sonja Andersen/October 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Reason for Modification

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 4

Hunting District: 419

Year: 2020-2021

1. Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). **REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

For the upcoming 2020-21 hunting seasons:

- Add a late shoulder season to the general and 004-00 Elk B licenses for HD 419, valid for antlerless elk only through February 15.

Modifications to the 2020-21 Montana Deer/Elk Hunting Regulations would read (changes highlighted in **RED**):

Elk						
General Elk License	Either-sex Elk Antlerless Elk	-	-	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24-Nov 29 Nov 30-Feb 15	
Elk B License: 004-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	4,800	Sep 05-Oct 18	Oct 24- Nov 30 Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge. Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

The objective of this proposed change is to provide landowners in HD, which is part of the Golden Triangle EMU, the opportunity to harvest antlerless elk on their properties during winter, when elk from over-objective, neighboring districts, tend to move into the northwestern portion of this HD. As a result, FWP staff will potentially receive fewer game damage complaints.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be measured by increased harvest of cow elk when cow elk are in the district, fewer game damage complaints, and less concern expressed by landowners when shoulder seasons are occurring in neighboring districts.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

There are no formal elk surveys of HD 419, and given the amount of agriculture that occurs here, the objectives are for a minimal, or zero, number of elk. Neighboring HD 426 also has a high amount of agriculture but a significant amount of elk habitat, and its objective is 75 total elk. While flying telemetry in HD 426, en route to the telemetry area, the area biologist observed 83 elk in HD 419, by happenstance. A more thorough survey of the HD would likely reveal more elk. Also, in the last five years, average harvest has over doubled in this HD (from average 11 to 26 elk/year), indicating that there are likely increasing numbers of elk expanding into this district.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature/precipitation information).

This HD is largely private land. Due to limited elk presence and propensity of agriculture, most landowners allow public hunting, as they do not want to see elk on their properties. Elk are expanding in number and distribution across surrounding districts, so it makes sense that the same is occurring for HD 419. This proposal is an attempt to give HD 419 landowners the tool they need to better manage elk on their properties during the late season without relying on game damage assistance, which is difficult to clarify given the overall lack of elk presence on their properties during the archery/general seasons. The probability of pay-to-play/outfitting activities in this district is limited by default due to the lack of elk habitat, so the advent of a shoulder season will not impinge on archery/general season opportunities.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Landowners in HD 419 are largely supportive of this proposal, as they lobbied for it during the 2018-19 season-setting process (albeit past the deadline to make changes). This proposal will have no negative impact on sportsman opportunity as already there is limited opportunity in this district. Instead, this proposal allows for landowners to immediately deal with game damage/elk management on their properties, while conserving important FWP staff time for other winter obligations.

Submitted by: Sonja Andersen/October 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 4

Hunting District: 420, 425 & 455

Year: 2020

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

This proposal aims to add Region 4 HDs 420, 425 & 455 to the 900-20 archery elk permit bundle. This will aid in creating consistency with HDs included in the 900-20 permit as well as follow Commission direction to fit 100% limited entry rifle in a HD.

2. Why is the proposed change necessary?

To ensure that HDs that currently have permit-only cow elk hunting also have permit-only either-sex hunting.

- 3. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**
- 4. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature/precipitation information).**
- 5. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

The proposal was vetted internally.

Submitted by: Wildlife Division

Date: 10/28/2019

Approved: 10/xx/19

Regional Supervisor / Date

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: ELK

Region: 4

Hunting Districts: 421/423 (Birdtail Hills EMU)

Year: 2020 & 2021 Hunting Seasons

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

Reduce late shoulder season antlerless elk hunting (exclude December) for HDs 421/423 (Birdtail Hills EMU) and HDs 422/444 for elk general, 004-00 and 422-00 elk licenses.

In HD 421, permits affording the opportunity to harvest antlerless elk were available since at least 1982. Beginning in 1993, antlerless permits were initiated the week before the general season. For the 2000 season, the season was readjusted back to only 5 weeks. For the 2002 season, two different sets of antlerless permits (one before the general season, one after the general season) were made available and valid in both hunting districts 421 and 423. Also beginning in 2002 the general rifle season was changed from an antlered bull elk season to either-sex elk. The general season has remained either-sex since then. Unlimited B licenses were made available for the 2003 hunting season under special season setting circumstances. These B licenses were expanded into the archery and late seasons and made valid only on private and DNRC lands for 2004 and 2005. Consolidated into one regional B license in 2008, these licenses have remained in their current form (with increasing quota levels) since this time.

Beginning in 2016/17, special early (Aug. 15 – Archery opener) and late season (Jan. 1 – Feb. 15) ‘shoulder season’ hunts were established in accordance with the criteria adopted by FW commission at the October 2015. Other special or spontaneous game damage hunts have been completed off and on during these same time periods. Beginning in 2018, general and elk B licenses were further liberalized to include the entirety of the late shoulder season.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Past antlerless harvest opportunity in HD 423 has incorporated either sex general season types as well as antlerless permits limited (for rifle) to the general rifle season. In 1998 the general rifle season became 4 weeks antlered bull elk and the last week either-sex elk. Prior to 1998, the general season was antlered bull elk only. For the 2002 season, two different sets of antlerless permits (one before the general season, one after the general season) were made available and valid in both hunting districts. For the 2002 season, two different sets of antlerless permits (one before the general season, one after the general season) were made available and valid in both hunting districts 421 and 423. Also beginning in 2002 the general rifle season was changed from the antlered bull elk/either-sex season to either-sex elk for the entire 5 weeks. Unlimited B licenses were made available for the 2003 hunting season under special season setting circumstances. These B licenses were expanded into the archery and late seasons and made valid only on private and DNRC lands for 2004 and 2005. Consolidated into one regional B license in 2008, these licenses have remained in their current form (with increasing quota levels) since this time. Beginning in 2016/17, special late season (Jan. 1 – Feb. 15) ‘shoulder season’ hunting was established in accordance with the criteria adopted by FW commission at the October, 2015. Other special or spontaneous game damage hunts have been completed off and on during these same time periods. Beginning in 2018, general and elk B licenses were further liberalized to include the entirety of the late shoulder season as well as adding the early shoulder season period (August 15 – archery opener).

For HD 422, the general elk hunting season has been either-sex for at least the last 30 years. Beginning in 1999 and in response to consistent landowner requests for late hunting opportunity on late arriving elk, a fixed and pre-determined late hunt season structure was initiated. Starting at the end of December, twenty antlerless permits were valid each weekend for six weeks (120 total permits) in a portion of the hunting district. This structure was in place until the winter of 2002-2003 when all of 100 (permits were lowered) antlerless permits were made valid throughout the entire hunting district from the day after the general season ends through February 15. Beginning in 2006 the late season structure was eliminated as part of a statewide effort to close late season hunts and make the general season the priority to harvest elk. The 422 specific elk B licenses have remained in place, but have been limited to the normal archery/general season hunting period and valid the entire HD. Unlimited over-the-counter R4 B licenses were made available beginning in 2003. These licenses became limited later on, but ultimately are currently still sold via surplus over the counter. Beginning in 2016/17, special late season (Jan. 1 – Feb. 15) ‘shoulder season’ hunting was established and specific to the regional elk B license in accordance with the criteria adopted by FW commission at the October 2015. Other special or spontaneous game damage hunts have been completed off and on during these same time periods. Beginning in 2018, general and elk B licenses were further liberalized to include the entirety of the late shoulder season.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

For HD 444, the general elk hunting season has also been either-sex for at least the last 30 years. This HD does not normally have significant and/or consistent elk presence, perhaps best described as a transitory presence more than anything. This HD belongs to the Golden Triangle elk management unit (EMU) which has minimal management goals and population objectives due to the very sporadic and minimal nature of elk presence, although this is changing at least specific to HD 444 and further described in this proposal. The only regulation package identified in the elk plan pertains to a six-week either-sex archery season and a five-week either-sex general rifle season on the general elk license. Unlimited over-the-counter R4 elk B licenses were made available beginning in 2003. Beginning in 2018, general and elk B licenses were also included in the shoulder season structure to assist in managing harvest as/if elk from HD 422 redistribute themselves during portions of the winter period into portions of HD 444.

Current Elk Regulations

HD 421

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 6 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Either-sex Elk.
- Dec 02 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 6 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

HD 423

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 6 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Dec 02 – Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.
- Dec 02 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 6 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

HD 422

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 6 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Either-sex Elk.
- Dec 02 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 06 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 06 – Oct 20 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

422-00: 200 B Licenses.

- Aug 15 – Sept 06 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Antlerless Elk.
- Dec 02 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk. Not valid on National Forest lands.

HD 444

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 06 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Either-sex Elk.
- Dec 02 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 06 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Proposed Elk Regulations

HD 421

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Either-sex Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 26 – Nov 29 – Antlerless Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

HD 423

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 – Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Brow-tined Bull or Antlerless Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Antlerless Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

HD 422

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Either-sex Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk Only. Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 - Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Antlerless Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

422-00: 200 B Licenses.

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 - Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Antlerless Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk. Not valid on National Forest lands.

HD 444

General Elk License.

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Either-sex Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

Elk B License. Drawing only. Apply by June 1.

004-00: 6000 B licenses. Not valid on National Forest lands, FWP WMAs, or CMR Refuge.

Valid in all Region 4 HDs except HDs 410 and 455

- Aug 15 – Sept 04 – Antlerless Elk.
- Sep 05 – Oct 18 - Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season.
- Oct 24 – Nov 29 – Antlerless Elk.
- Jan 01 – Feb 15 – Antlerless Elk.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

HDs 421/423 –

These two hunting districts comprise the Birdtail Hills elk management unit (EMU). Collectively, elk populations in this EMU continue to remain above objective levels (Figure 1). Liberal elk hunting

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

seasons to include shoulder season hunts initiated in 2016/17 season, as well as other annual efforts through localized game damage hunting efforts, elk numbers continue to remain above objective. Taking into account one more full shoulder season (2019/20) and subsequent harvest, primary justifications to remove a portion of the late shoulder season period are to 1) begin the process to slowly wane away from the need for full shoulder season implementation (hopefully) while still maintaining some shoulder season type to help with continued harvest needs; 2) allow landowner/hunter rest from the hunting season (some concerns over 6 month hunting period); 3) elk rest from the hunting season with the intent to let animals settle and start up hunting again for six weeks during the winter period (Jan 1 - Feb 15); and 4) accommodate to some degree to those landowners (and hunters?) that don't prefer any shoulder season hunting.

HDs 422 (& 444) –

Prior to the 2006 implementation of the strict 5 week season, late season antlerless hunting opportunities in HD 422 were considered a necessary component of elk management as many elk wintering in HD 422 may not arrive out of backcountry habitats or areas within another hunting district (280) until well after the general season ends. Elk populations within HD 422 remain above objective levels and have been for several years (Figure 2). Despite liberal elk hunting seasons to include the addition of late shoulder season hunts initiated in 2016/17, as well as annual efforts through localized game damage hunting efforts, elk numbers continue to remain above objective. Taking into account one more full shoulder season (2019/20) and subsequent harvest, primary justifications to remove a portion of the late shoulder season period are to 1) begin process to slowly wane away from the need for full shoulder season implementation (hopefully) while still maintaining some shoulder season type to help with continued harvest needs; 2) allow landowner/hunter rest from the hunting season (some concerns over 6 month hunting period); 3) elk rest from the general hunting season (let animals settle) and/or allow them to become more accessible once they migrate to 'winter range' areas, with the intent to start up hunting again for six weeks during the winter period (Jan 1 - Feb 15); and 4) accommodate to some degree to those landowners (and hunters?) that don't prefer any or very limited shoulder season hunting and/or are willing to allow some limited hunting that does help keep elk from being to stationary.

Providing this early and late season structure valid for the entirety of these four HDs provides an additional tool that in addition to normal general season harvest (archery and rifle). This proposed change will hopefully prove to be effective in still allowing further harvest on antlerless elk, limit the persistence of chronic refuge areas, and effectively break up larger groups of elk into smaller groups in order to lessen the direct damage to agriculture operations all while recognizing concerns of long hunting seasons on landowners, elk and hunters alike.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Note: Inclusion of HD 444 serves to allow additional harvest opportunity as/if elk do 'show up' in immediately adjacent portions of this HD with respect to HD 422. Specifically, this area primarily is speaking to the southwest area of HD 444 just east of the Dearborn River area. Depending on winter weather conditions and hunting pressure, significant elk presence can occur in this area, thereby making them inaccessible to harvest based on current regulations. Rather than make a boundary change and the potential complications that could arise (hunters/landowners needing to learn a new boundary and hoping this new boundary would effectively address the situation given elk distribution), it was decided that adding the entire HD into the shoulder season would be most effective. Elk distribution will dictate as/if there is a need for additional hunter presence in this HD.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

As per guidelines outlined from the October 2015 commission adopted 'flexible season structure with performance-based shoulder season criteria', a large part of how the success of these liberalized season types will be measured related to the shoulder season harvest and population survey criteria. In summarizing these details for the first three-year period (2016-2018). HDs 421/423 fall within the above population objective and meeting all harvest criteria scenario. Elk numbers continue to trend down from the peak observed in 2013 (see attached), with most recent observed numbers 10% above the top end of the overall population 'objective'. HDs 422 (& 444) fall within the above population objective and not meeting all harvest criteria scenario. Elk numbers are continuing to trend down from the peak observed in 2011 (see attached figure), although most recent observed numbers place winter observations 79% above the top end of the overall population 'objective'. Elk in at least the southern half of this HD typically are limited in accessibility for hunters until early winter period due to their migratory nature from back country areas. This is having some effect on needed harvest during the archery/general rifle seasons.

Additional future measurements of success will be observed through hunter access, success and support, landowner comments, concerns and support, observed elk distribution, and reduced game damage complaints.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

The current elk plan for the Birdtail EMU calls for population level observations to be within 20% of 500 elk during post season aerial trend surveys. See Figure 1 for a summary of recent elk survey results and estimated harvest. 2019 dedicated aerial winter surveys gave way to a minimum observation of 661 elk. As is observed in Figure 1, elk populations within this EMU are currently above objective levels and have been for several years.

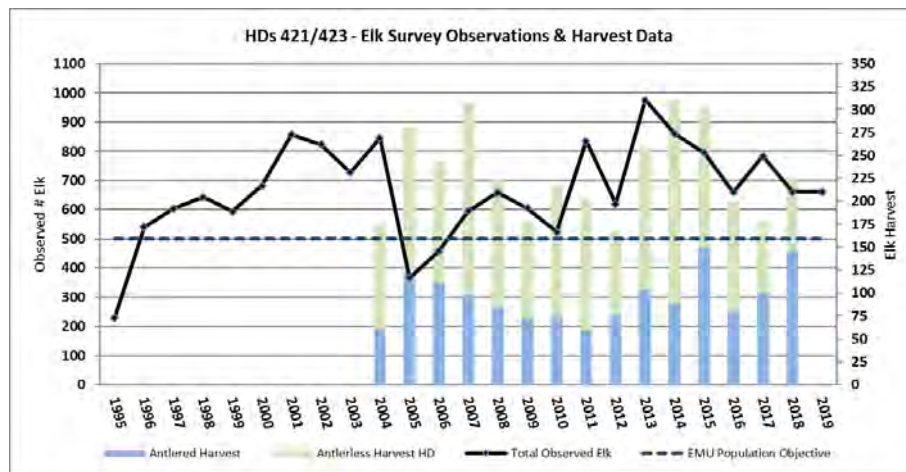


Figure 1. HD 421/423 elk survey observations and estimated harvest with respect to EMU objective, 1995-2019. The black and blue dotted lines are associated with the left Y axis. The green/blue bars are associated with the right Y axis.

The current elk plan for HD 422 calls for population level observations to be within 10% of 500 elk during post season aerial trend surveys. See Figure 2 for a summary of recent elk survey and harvest data. As previously stated, elk populations within this hunting district are currently above objective levels and have been for several years.

HD 444 has no set population objectives given the lack of routine elk presence. As previously stated, only in recent years during the winter period are elk becoming more “common” in southwest portions of this HD. Given the significant amount of land in this HD that is devoted to agricultural production and certain damage potential of elk with regard to recreational potential, it is FWPs intent to prevent permanent occupancy of elk in this area.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

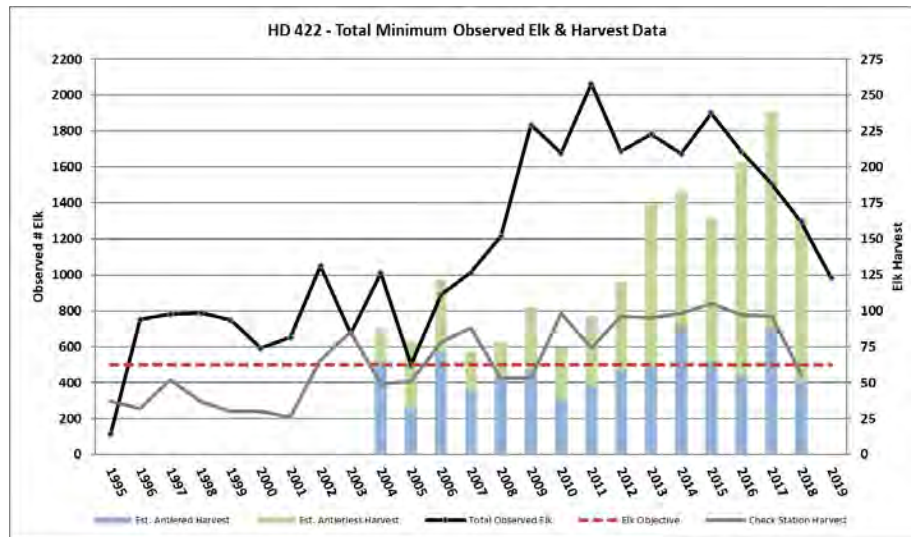


Figure 2. HD 422 elk population observations 1995-2019. The black and red dotted lines are associated with the left Y axis. The green/blue bars and gray line are associated with the right Y axis.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The vast majority of wintering elk in these four HDs persist primarily on private lands. Some elk will be closely associated with private lands throughout the year. Although a number of private properties entertain significant levels of hunting pressure during the general season, certain areas are either closed or mostly closed to hunting. This reality, as it creates relatively secure areas for elk to move into, will continue to limit potential gains any season adjustment stands to generate. Game damage is most often reported as heavy elk use of private agricultural property during winter (fences and standing residual forage), late spring (fences and green-up) and late summer (fences, alfalfa and grain-ripe).

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Additionally, despite recent hard winters these last couple winters, impacts to elk have been minimal. Late spring and summer vegetation growing conditions have also been relatively good during this time. Both of the latter factors have allowed for continued good to fair elk recruitment and survival from year to year.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Conversations, phone messages and/or emails have been left with many landowners that comprise portions of the area in which elk hunting opportunity would occur. Landowner input back to FWP has *generally* tolerated this proposed change in the hopes that more elk will/can be harvested yet alleviating the impact of long hunting seasons. Emphasis on *generally* given there are those that prefer shoulder seasons to go away. With longer seasons does come added work to some degree (more telephone calls, hunter requests, etc.). Landowners have to tolerate some additional hunter requests beyond the existing general and shoulder season opportunities. Additionally, this reduction in shoulder season harvest opportunity does have justification to limit impacts to those landowners and/or hunters that do not prefer these longer seasons (see Section 1 justifications). There are concerns of elk still finding those security areas that will likely be present.

Submitted by: Brent Lonner, Fairfield area biologist.

Date: October 25, 2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 4

Hunting District: Deer/Elk Hunting District 425

Year: 2020/21 seasons

- 1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Reduce the HD 425 weekly limited antlerless elk licenses from 6 weeks to 3 weeks (eliminating the last three weeks).

Current:

425-00: 20 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Oct 21 - Oct 27 - Antlerless Elk.

425-01: 20 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Oct 28 - Nov 03 - Antlerless Elk.

425-02: 15 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Nov 04 - Nov 10 - Antlerless Elk.

425-03: 15 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Nov 11 - Nov 17 - Antlerless Elk.

425-04: 10 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Nov 18 - Nov 24 - Antlerless Elk.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

425-05: 10 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Nov 25 – Dec 01 - Antlerless Elk.

Proposed:

425-00: 30 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Oct 19 - Oct 25 - Antlerless Elk.

425-01: 25 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Oct 26 - Nov 01 - Antlerless Elk.

425-02: 20 B Licenses. Valid entire HD including Sun River WMA.

- Nov 02 - Nov 08 - Antlerless Elk.

Antlerless permits were available for all or portions of HD 425 since at least 1986. From 1990 through the 1998 season, antlerless permits were available in three separate weeklong increments starting with the week before the general season and running through the first two weeks of the general season. During years of very conservative prescribed harvest, HD 425 antlerless permits were removed for the 1999 and 2000 seasons. As elk population numbers and harvest quotas increased, two weeks of antlerless permits (20 per week) were reintroduced for the 2001 and 2002 seasons. An additional week (three sets of 20 weekly permits for three total weeks) was reintroduced for the 2003 season. Beginning in 2008, one more additional week (fourth week) was added in attempts to further help reduce elk number and presence of elk on the Sun River WMA. Antlerless permits were changed to antlerless licenses beginning in 2010. Finally, in 2012, the last two weeks of the general season were incorporated into the weeklong antlerless B license hunts. This same year, the opportunity for the weekly B license holders to have the opportunity to take a 2nd antlerless elk (within the Sun River WMA) with their general elk license was instituted. In 2016, the ability to take a 2nd antlerless elk via their general elk license was eliminated along with a reduction in licenses across all weeks in response to decreasing elk numbers. Permits (B-licenses) were removed from the Sun River elk quota system (HDs 424 and 442) in 1998 to allow flexibility in setting quotas and to ensure that permits were valid even after conservative harvest quotas had been met. Total antlerless permits/licences available and antlerless harvest from 1990-present are in Table 1 below.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 1. Antlerless elk permit/license numbers and harvest in HD 425, 1990-present. Antlerless harvest data comes from elk checked at Augusta check station. Most antlerless harvest in HD 425 is associated with permits/licenses (some limited general license opportunity exists outside the SRWMA).

Year	TOTAL # ANTLERLESS PERMITS/LICENSES (ESTIMATED HARVEST)	% Success	Year	TOTAL # ANTLERLESS PERMITS/LICENSES (AUGUSTA CH. STN. HARVEST)	% Success
1990	100 (13)	13%	2005	75 (8)	11%
1991	100 (46)	46%	2006	75 (35)	47%
1992	100 (93)	93%	2007	105 (51)	49%
1993	100 (8)	8%	2008	125 (11)	9%
1994	100 (25)	25%	2009	95 (43)	45%
1995	55 (14)	25%	2010	95 (2)	2%
1996	55 (14)	25%	2011	125 (11)	9%
1997	55 (13)	24%	2012	195 (140*)	72%*
1998	15 (4)	27%	2013	195 (106*)	54%*
1999	0 (0)		2014	135 (60*)	44%
2000	0 (6)		2015	195 (154*)**	79%
2001	20 (13)	65%	2016	90 (10)	11%
2002	40 (20)	50%	2017	90 (51)	57%
2003	60 (39)	65%	2018	90 (55)	61%
2004	75 (27)	36%		Long-Term Average	39%

* hunters who held one of the special weekly licenses were allowed to harvest an additional antlerless elk with their general elk license. Estimated harvest includes these additionally harvested elk so overall individual success on these weekly licenses is actually lower than the percentage indicated.

**weekly license levels were accidentally reissued at 2014 levels.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this proposal seeks to reduce the need or amount of antlerless harvest specific to Sun River elk, especially during the latter half of the general rifle season. Current *minimum observed* elk numbers for this herd of elk (winter/spring 2019) place overall number's below objective for the first time since approximately the 1999/2000 period (Table 2, Figure 1). As is noted in Section 1, the liberalization of these licenses occurred over several years in order to help reduce migratory elk numbers when Sun River elk reached recent historic highs in 2011 (>3,000 elk). A good portion of the harvest on these licenses occurs the 2nd half of the general rifle season as stronger numbers of elk begin arriving to their winter range on the Sun River WMA hence the proposed elimination specific to these last three weeks. Maintaining the first three weeks of early rifle hunting still serves an important role to focus some limited hunting/harvest on resident and/or early migrating elk on the primarily the WMA,

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

something that is not desirable due to concerns of their impacts on winter range habitat, if left unchecked, over time. This season also coincides with management types (quota level fluctuations) outlined in adjacent Sun River elk HD's 424 and 442.

These proposed reductions are in agreement with previous discussions and commitments made with the Upper Sun Wildlife Team (USWT – formerly Sun River Working Group).

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

Success of this proposal will be monitored and gauged through Augusta check station harvest records and hunter satisfaction, summer and winter elk survey observations with respect to population objectives, and game damage complaints received during the fall/winter period from landowners adjacent to the Sun River WMA. Further reductions (or increases) in these weekly license quota levels could be made in time depending on Sun River population survey and observations.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Through winter and early spring 2019 *minimum observations* of this herd, overall elk numbers are below population objective levels of +/- 10% of 2500 observed elk (n = 2,107 observed elk - Table 2, Figure 1). Additionally, observed calf/100 cow ratios these past few winters portray relatively low calf recruitment in the mid-teens calves/100 cows (Table 2). Low calf recruitment these last few years is cause for some concern related to future herd productivity. Recent brow-tined bull observations have been generally strong due to recent high populations levels (Table 2, Figure 1) but are also showing signs of reduced numbers. 2018 Sun River elk harvest, (August check station - HDs 424, 425 and 442) was fair and amounted to 165 elk (52 bulls, 103 cows, and 10 calves), approximately 1/3 of which came from HD 425 specific to the HD 425 antlerless weekly licenses.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Harvest success on these licenses (collective success over the entire general rifle season) is variable with success rates over the last 20+ years as high as near 100% and as low as less than 10%. Average success is 39% (Augusta check station records). Typically, harvest success is higher as the season progresses given the likelihood of increased elk presence on the WMA as they begin their annual migration. Variability of annual success is strongly tied to fall weather patterns and migratory nature of Sun River elk. Cold and snow typically force at least some percentage of elk onto their WMA winter range if it is received early in the season, which can provide good hunting opportunity. Of course, lack of cold and snowy weather can create just the opposite circumstances. Focusing harvest on resident and early migrating elk (first three weeks of these licenses) remains important to mitigate further unnecessary summer and early fall use of winter range habitat. On some parts of the winter range, nearly 100% of the forage plants are utilized during the winter period. On-going plant community monitoring suggests reduced plant vigor for at least portions of the WMA, but also some stability in other places. High utilization of this finite forage resource could be detrimental to the long-term health of this herd. Further, private landowners adjacent to the SRWMA are willing to tolerate few, if any, elk at any time of the year, but are tolerant of allowing some antlerless elk hunting opportunity when elk are available. The general elk license does still allow antlerless elk hunting opportunity on private land in this HD as/if elk are present off the WMA during the general season.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Given previous conversations with the USWT and other informal conversations with local Augusta area individuals regarding availability and intent of these licenses, no significant concerns related to the proposed changes are expected. As stated previously and with respect to commitments made during conversations had at USWT meetings, a reduction in these licenses by reducing the number of weeks they would be available is warranted given most recent observations of total herd numbers. There will certainly be some dissatisfaction of this reduced opportunity for those that have in recent years traditionally applied for these licenses available later in the season. Although the reduction/elimination in opportunity is justifiable as hunters were used as a tool to help manage elk numbers to a lower level but given current population levels the need for this management tool later in the general rifle season is unnecessary.

Submitted by: Brent Lonner

Date: October 21, 2019

**2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range,
Justifications**

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk

Region: 5

Hunting Districts:

500, 502, Portion of 510 west of HWY 310, 511, Portion of 520 north and west of West Fork of
Rock Creek, 530, 540, 560 Portion north of Falls Creek, 570, 575, 580, Portion of 590 north of
Yellowstone River

Year: 2020-2021

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).** *Increase the 005-00 Elk B-license quota range from 500-2500 to 500-4000 licenses.*

Change From:

005-00: 1500 B-Licenses

Aug 15 – Sep 06 – Antlerless Elk Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD

Sep 07 –Oct 20 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Oct 21 – Oct 25 – Antlerless Elk Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD

Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Antlerless Elk

Dec 02 – Feb 15 - Antlerless Elk Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD

Change To:

005-00: **2500** B-Licenses

Aug 15 – Sep 06 – Antlerless Elk Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD

Sep 07 – Oct 20 – Antlerless Elk. Archery Only Season

Oct 21 – Oct 25 – Antlerless Elk Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD

Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Antlerless Elk

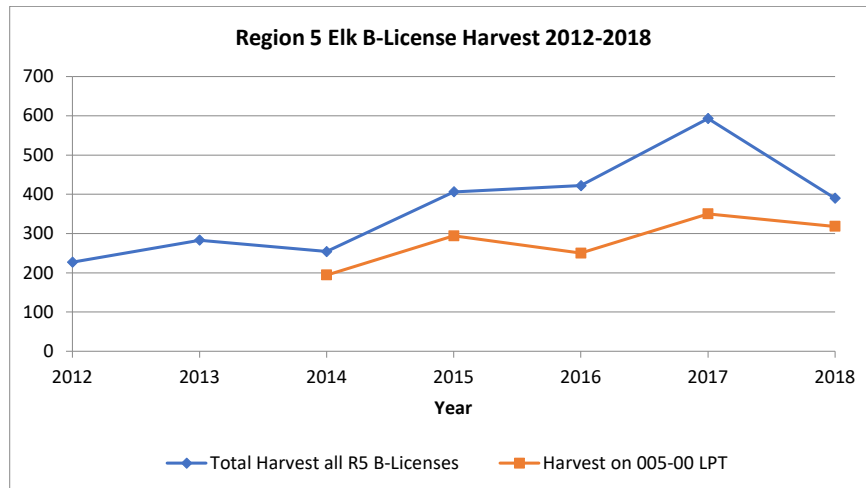
Dec 02 – Feb 15 - Antlerless Elk Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD

Table 1. History of Season Types and B License Levels for Elk in Region 5 hunting districts.

Year	General License	Elk B-Licenses
2014	Either Sex or Spike Bull/ Antlerless	1200 R5 B lic + 1000, 900-80
2015	Either Sex or Spike Bull/ Antlerless	1200 R5 B lic + 1000, 900-80
2016	Either Sex or Spike Bull/ Antlerless	1200 R5 B lic + HD specific B-licenses
2017	Either Sex or Spike Bull/ Antlerless	1500 R5 B lic + HD specific B-licenses
2018	Either Sex or Spike Bull/ Antlerless	1500 R5 B lic + HD specific B-licenses
2019	Either Sex or Spike Bull/ Antlerless	2500 R5 B lic + HD specific B-licenses (proposed)

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Figure 1. Elk harvest information from the hunter harvest survey, 2012-2018. The 005-00 region wide elk B-license was created in 2014.



2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this proposal is to increase antlerless elk harvest and maximize hunter and landowner opportunity to harvest elk by increasing the number of 005-00 elk B-licenses available. Hunter demand for this license has increased steadily since 2014, when the license was first implemented. See Table 2. We want to offer enough licenses to satisfy all 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, choice applicants while still having some licenses available for surplus sale. In 2018, all but 1 license went out through the drawing, leaving nothing available for surplus sale during the hunting season. This left some landowners and hunters who had not applied for a license, unable to get a B license after the drawing was completed. The proposed B license quota increase will satisfy that demand for several years.

All districts in this proposal are over elk population objective. The general spike bull/antlerless season combined with the region wide Elk B-license are available in every district to help address overall population increases through antlerless harvest. Some districts are either-sex seasons for the archery and/or general seasons. The region wide elk B-license is valid on private land only in the early and mid-

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

shoulder seasons and then not valid on National Forest lands during the archery, general and late shoulder seasons. Also, we have hunting district specific elk B-licenses that are valid throughout the district in districts containing National Forest Lands.

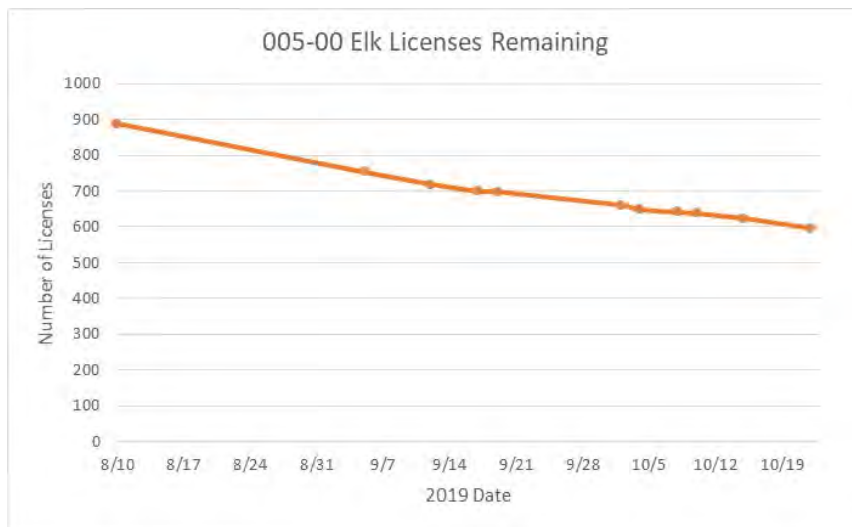
Table 2 displays the drawing statistics for the 005-00 B-license which has always been available to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd choice applicants and gone on surplus sale in all years except 2018. However, those remaining licenses were sold out usually before archery season started. We increased license numbers to provide some over the counter opportunity after the elk season starts August 15th to address requests from landowners and sportsmen looking to buy the 005-00 B-license after the elk season has started. In 2019, we had 888 licenses go surplus as of October 22, 2019 there were 595 licenses available.

Table 2. History of drawing statistics for the 005-00 B-License that was created in 2014. For licenses to be included in the surplus license sale ,10 or more licenses need to be available.

Year	Quota	1st, 2nd & 3rd Choice Applicants	Surplus
2014	1200	835	365
2015	1200	970	230
2016	1200	1179	21
2017	1500	1100	400
2018	1500	1499	1
2019	2500	1612	888

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Figure 2. Timeline of 005-00 elk b-license availability in 2019.



3. **How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Increasing the quota range of the 005-00 gives us flexibility to respond to the increasing hunter demand for this license. The success of increasing the number of 005-00 licenses can be evaluated three ways. First, the annual growth rates of the antlerless segment of the elk herds should gradually decline in these districts. Second, we should see an increase in antlerless harvest from the annual hunter harvest phone survey. Finally, this license increase should provide enough licenses to satisfy all 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice applicants and allow hunters who did not apply for a license to have a reasonable chance to purchase a surplus elk B license during the hunting season.

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

All districts covered in this proposal are over total elk population objective, except for district 510 where no annual elk survey is conducted (Table3). Elk numbers have been gradually increasing in these districts over the last decade and are expected to continue increasing without changes to the current hunting season structure.

Table 3. Elk populations and management objectives.

EMU	District or Portion	Total Elk Objective	2018-19 Total Elk Population	Bull Objective	2018-2019 Bull Population
Mid Yellowstone	500 ¹	60	270	10	119
	502	50	140	10	51
	Portion of 510 west of HWY 310	10	No Survey	10	No Survey
	570 ¹	100	398	20	95
	575	225	1148	25	96 ²
Crazy Mountains	580	975	4170	145	596
Absaroka	520	1050	1247	80	171
	560	700	1872	55	184 ³
Snowy Mountains	411	960	7204	120	1234
	511				
	530				
Little Belts	540	600	1915	175 EMU	198
Bull Mountains	590 Pine Ridge ¹	300	353	60	99
	590 Bull Mountains	750	2667	150	563

¹ Survey data from 2017-18 survey data.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

²Minimum bull count because this number does not include bulls observed but not classified in 368 elk.

³Minimum bull count because this number does not include bulls observed but not classified in 383 elk.

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Elk habitat within these districts generally consists of mountain foothills or timbered breaks habitat. These habitats types are highly productive for elk. They generally provide quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

This proposal gives us the flexibility to increase the opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest antlerless elk in these districts. Additionally, private landowners who wish to reduce elk numbers on their lands will have another tool to utilize if they decide to do so.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Numerous landowners and sportsmen in Region 5 have requested that we increase the number of 005-00 B-licenses. This proposal was also discussed with the area game wardens. No conflicts with landowners, sportsmen or other members of the public are anticipated.

Submitted by: Ashley Taylor

Date: 10/17//2019

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 5

Hunting District: 500

Year: 2020-2021

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

Increase the 500-20 Either-sex elk permit from 60 to 80 permits. Increase the Quota range from 10 - 60 permits to 10 - 125 permits.

Change From:

500-20: 60 permits

Sep 07 –Oct 20 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season

Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Either-Sex Elk

Change To:

500-20: **80** permits

Sep 07 –Oct 20 – Either-sex Elk. Archery Only Season

Oct 26 – Dec 01 – Either-Sex Elk

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 1. History of Season Types and Permit Levels for Elk in HD 500.

Year	General License	Either-Sex Permits	Elk B-Licenses
2008	Antlerless Elk	10 ES + 147, 500-15	
2009	Antlerless Elk	10 ES + 171, 500-15	
2010	Antlerless Elk	10 ES + 150, 500-15	
2011	Antlerless Elk	10 ES + 135, 500-15	
2012	Antlerless Elk	10 ES + 3700, 900-20	25 B lic + 700, 900-80
2013	Antlerless Elk	10 ES + 3700, 900-20	25 B lic + 1000, 900-80
2014	Spike Bull or Antlerless	10 ES + 3700, 900-20	1200 R5 B lic + 1000, 900-80
2015	Spike Bull or Antlerless	10 ES + 3700, 900-20	1200 R5 B lic + 1000, 900-80
2016	Spike Bull or Antlerless	20 ES + 3700, 900-20	1200 R5 B lic
2017	Spike Bull or Antlerless	40 ES + 3700, 900-20	1200 R5 B lic
2018	Spike Bull or Antlerless	60 ES + 3700, 900-20	1500 R5 B lic
2019	Spike Bull or Antlerless	60 ES + 3700, 900-20	2500 R5 B lic
2020	Spike Bull or Antlerless	80 ES + 3700, 900-20	2500 R5 B lic

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Elk in hunting district 500 are over the population objective of 60 elk (Table 2.) The general spike bull and antlerless season combined with Elk B licenses are available to help address overall population increases through antlerless harvest (Table 1.) However, the bull segment of the population is also exceeding the management objective in this district. The limited draw nature of this district makes it valued by hunters for their potential to provide hunting opportunities for older age class bulls.

FWP's ability to manage bull numbers by increasing the number of either sex permits is constrained by two primary factors. The first is landowner tolerance of hunters. Most of the occupied elk habitat in this district is private land. Access opportunities range from landowners who participate in Block Management to lands that are completely closed to all hunting access. As a result, landowners who allow access can be overrun with hunters who wish to hunt for a bull. These landowners frequently comment that they have more hunters asking permission than they have land to accommodate them. The second constraint is hunter expectations. This limited either-sex elk permit has drawing odds of 18%. Hunters who draw a permit have usually applied for several years and have used their valued bonus points to draw the permit. FWP has a responsibility to not issue coveted either sex elk permits to hunters when there is little chance the hunter will be able to secure access to hunt with that permit.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Consideration of the factors listed above results in three primary objectives of this proposed change. The first objective is to increase bull harvest by issuing an additional 20 either-sex permits. This will help to address the increasing bull population in this district. Second, by maintaining the limited either sex permits this will ensure a diverse and older age structure of bulls remains available to satisfy hunter's expectations for quality bull hunting opportunity. Maintaining the limited either sex permits will also continue to balance hunter expectations with landowner tolerance and available hunting opportunities. The intent is to slowly increase either-sex permit numbers to assess the access situation in this district for elk hunters.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposed change will be evaluated three ways. First, the annual growth rates of the bull segment of the elk herd should gradually decline. Second, we should see an increase in bull harvest from the annual hunter harvest phone survey. Third, we expect the harvest success rate on the limited either-sex permits to remain stable. If this rate declines this could indicate hunters are not successful in securing private lands to hunt on, or the number of older age class bulls is declining.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The current population exceeds the total population objective by 350% and bull numbers are 11 times over objective. The 2018 elk survey was the second total elk survey for HD500 with the first being 2016 (Table 2.) Previous counts were elk observed during mule deer surveys in HD500. The elk survey will be continued biennially with the next survey due in 2020. This is the fifth year of gradually increasing either-sex elk permits in this district. The growth rate of the bull segment of the herd is still increasing but might be slowing down. Bull harvest increased in 2017 (Table 3). We don't have harvest survey information for 2018 yet but the bull harvest likely increased again since we increased the permits last year. The harvest success rate in 2017 on the either-sex permit in this district was within the normal range of harvest success for that permit.

The 2017-18 winter was long and produced deep snow in the timbered draws in HD500 and had crusted snow 10 to 14 inches deep everywhere else from early December until late March. The harsh winter conditions and the increasing number of elk led to several elk game damage complaints and our first elk damage hunt in HD500. No game damage complaints have been received in 2018-19 winter so far.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 2. Elk observed and classified in HD500, 2007-2019

Year	BAB	Yrl Bull	Total Bulls	Cows	Total Adults	Calves	Unc.	Total	Calves/100 Cows	Bulls/100 Cows
2007	0	16	11	7	34	2	-	36	29	386
2008	5	3	0	2	10	2	-	12	100	400
2009	0	0	4	5	9	3	-	12	60	80
2011	-	-	13	1	14	0	-	14	-	-
2012	-	-	6		6	-	-	6	-	-
2013	-	-	24	16	40	2	-	42	-	-
2014	-	-	-	-	-	-	59	59	-	-
2015	-	-	-	-	-	-	47	47	-	-
2016*	92	11	103	78	181	37	0	218	47	132
2017	53	-	53	-	-	-	45	98	-	-
2018*	108	11	119	88	207	63	0	270	72	135
2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Total elk survey in HD500

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 3. Harvest statistics for HD 500, 2008-2018.

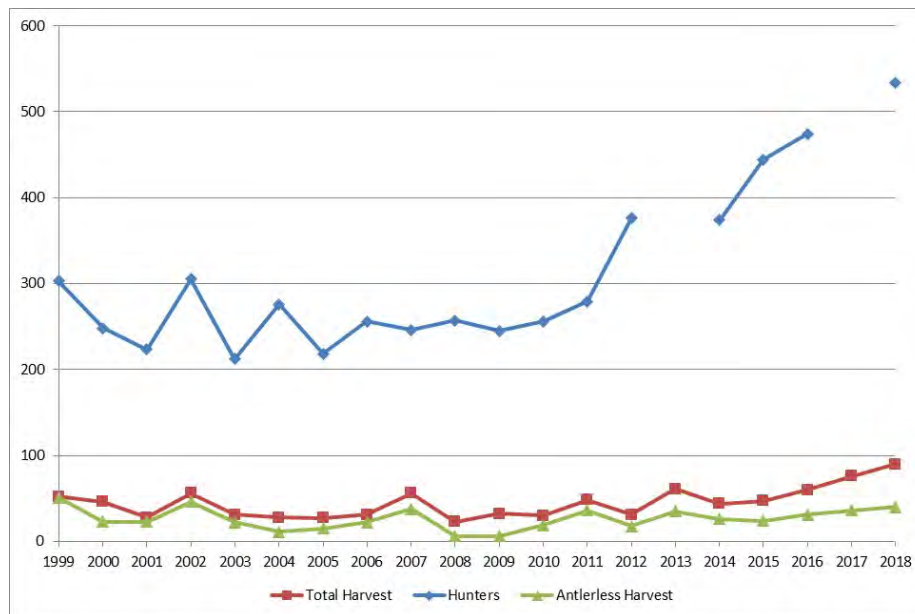
Year	No. of Hunters	No. of Permits or Licenses	BAB	Spikes	Cows	Calves	Unk.	Total
2008	260	10ES, 0	17 ¹	0	3	3	0	23
2009	260	10ES, 0	23	0	6	0	0	29
2010	256	10ES, 0	11	0	13	6	0	30
2011	279	10ES, 0	12	1	30	5	0	48
2012	376	10ES, 25	13	0	18	0	0	31
2013	-	10ES, 25	20	6	35	0	0	61
2014	375	10ES, 1093 ²	13	6	24	2	0	44
2015	443	10ES, 1200 ²	18	6	21	3	0	47
2016	474	20ES, 1200 ²	26	3	31	0	0	60
2017		40ES, 1500 ²	28	12	27	9	0	76
2018	534	60ES, 1500 ²	30	20	38	2	0	90

¹ Archery harvest is significant in this hunting district and is the reason bull harvest is higher than the number of ES permits.

² Elk B-licenses were combined and valid for most Region 5 elk hunting districts (lpt 005-00).

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Figure 1. Elk harvest information from the hunter harvest survey, 1999-2018.



5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

The habitat in hunting district 500 generally consists of open rangeland and cropland with timbered breaks habitat in the northern and southern portions of the district. Most of the district is private land with state land sections scattered throughout the district. Elk in this district are highly mobile and utilize ponderosa pine breaks extensively. These habitat types are highly productive for elk and generally provide quality summer and winter range resulting in high annual survival and high rates of recruitment. These factors result in robust and increasing elk herds even during periods of unfavorable weather conditions.

**2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range,
Justifications**

This proposal will increase the opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest bull elk in this district. It will give private landowners who wish to reduce bull elk numbers on their lands another tool to utilize if they decide to do so. No impacts to public and private land use are anticipated.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Some of the landowners in HD500 have requested that we increase the number of either-sex permits. This proposal was also discussed with the area game wardens. No conflicts with landowners, sportsmen or other members of the public are anticipated.

Submitted by: Ashley Taylor

Date: 10/17/2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Species: Elk

Region: 5

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Hunting District: 540

Year: 2020-2021

1. Describe the proposed season / quota changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). **REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

Modifications to the 2020-21 Montana Deer/Elk Hunting Regulations would read (changes highlighted in **RED**):

Deleted: ¶

HD 540:

Elk						
General Elk License	Brow-tined bull or Antlerless Elk Either-Sex Elk	-	-	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 01	
	Antlerless Elk	-	-	-	Aug 15-Sep 06 Oct 21-Oct 25	Only valid on private land.
					Dec 02-Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs
Elk B License: 540-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	100	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Feb 15	
Elk B License: 005-00	Antlerless Elk	June 1	1,500	Sep 07-Oct 20	Oct 26-Dec 1	Not valid on National Forest lands. Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD.
				-	Aug 15-Sep 06 Oct 21-Oct 25	Only valid on private land. Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD.
				-	Dec 2 – Feb 15	Not valid on National Forest lands or FWP WMAs. Valid in Region 5 HDs as listed under each HD.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

Elk in hunting district 540 are 219% over the population objective of 600 elk (Table 2.) The general brow-tined bull and antlerless season combined with Elk B licenses are available to help address

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

overall population increases through antlerless harvest (Table 1.) However, the bull segment of the population is also exceeding the management objective in this district.

FWP's ability to manage elk numbers in HD540 is constrained by landowner tolerance of hunters. A good portion of elk use in this district, during hunting season, is on private land. Access opportunities range from landowners who participate in Block Management to lands that are completely closed to all hunting access. As a result, landowners who allow access can be overrun with hunters looking to hunt elk. These landowners frequently comment that they have more hunters asking permission than they have land to accommodate them. Landowners who want to restrict bull harvest on their property can impose their own hunting restrictions on their property. FWP doesn't have a biological reason to restrict hunting opportunity of elk in HD540 to brow-tined bull or antlerless at the current population numbers. This district was under either-sex elk hunting on the general license from 2008 through 2017. During that time harvest increased from 118 total elk to 366 total elk harvested in 2017. Spike bull harvest has remained low from 2008 - 2017, ranging from 11 to 46 spikes harvested, with an average of 26 spikes harvested. Total elk numbers during this same time period increased from 979 total elk observed in 2007 to 2046 total elk observed in 2017.

Consideration of the factors listed above results in three primary objectives of this proposed change. The first objective is to decrease regulation complexity in the Little Belt Mountains EMU. HD540 is the only district in the EMU that is not either-sex elk on the general license. The Little Belt Mountain EMU consists of seven other hunting districts that are all either-sex elk on the general license. This causes confusion among hunters hunting on Forest Service land where on one side of a two-track road you can shoot spike elk but on the other side of the road you can't. Second, changing back to either-sex elk should decrease the amount of shot and left spike elk that occurred in HD540 during the 2018 hunting season. Third, increase bull harvest by going back to an either-sex elk regulation on the general elk license. This will help to address the increasing bull population in this district.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this proposed change is to simplify the regulations for the public and internal staff. The success of simplified regulations is difficult to measure but will ideally result in fewer questions from the public regarding what elk they can harvest in HD540 and why that hunting district is more restricted if elk are so far over objective. Second, we should see a decrease in illegally harvested spike citations issued in HD540. If landowners want to restrict bull hunting on their property, they can impose a brow-tined bull restriction on their own property but FWP doesn't need to impose that

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

regulation at the hunting district scale. Third, we should see an increase in bull harvest from the annual hunter harvest phone survey.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 1. Elk classification for HD 540, 1988-2019

Year Wint/Spg	Bulls			Cows	Calves	Unc	Total	Calves/ 100 Cows	Bulls/ 100 elk	Bulls/ 100 Cows
	BAB	SP	Total							
1988 Apr	-	-	-	49	28	230	307	-	-	-
1989 Apr	3	9	12	114	29	243	398	25	3	-
1990 Feb	5	25	30	259	88	86	463	34	6	9 ⁴
1991 Jan	0	18	18	42	16	304	380	-	5	-
1991 Feb	5	34	39	224	59	183	505	34	5	11 ⁴
1992 Feb	3	8	11	158	54	208	431	34	3	4 ⁴
1992 Apr	3	5	8	139	27	503	677	19	1	-
1993 Apr	11	27	38	225	68	231	562	30	7	9 ⁴
1994 Apr	2	3	5	89	21	78	193	24	3	-
Apr	0	0	0	0	0	529	529	0	0	0
1995 Apr	18	5	23	351	64	208	646	18	4	4 ⁴
1996 Mar	9	0	7	25	5	536	574	19	1	1 ⁴
May	16	-	-	-	-	600	600	-	-	-
1997 Feb	27	1	3	65	9	0	78	78	-	-
1997 Apr	11	NA	NA	NA	NA	609	609	609	-	-
1998 Mar	10	19	29	76	13	442	560	560	17	5
1999 Mar	6	7	13	87	17	550	667	667	20	-
2000 Apr	4	27	31	NA	NA	464	495	-	6	NA
2001 Mar	0	16	16	45	12	574	647	-	2	NA
2002 Apr	7	12	19	35	9	640	703	-	3	NA
2003 Apr ⁶	25	11	36	38	6	758	838	-	4	NA
2004 Apr ^{6,7}	2	20	22	107	61	439	629	-	3	NA
2005 Apr	26	8	55 ¹	0	0	720	775	-	7	NA
2006 Apr	6	15	24 ¹	12	2	856	894	-	3	NA
2007 Apr	3	5	67 ¹	82	12	818	979	-	7	NA
2008 Apr	75	24	99	0	0	1184	1283	-	8	NA
2009 Apr	24	52	100 ¹	85	13	1199	1397	-	7	NA
2010 Apr	3	47	58 ¹	38	4	1168	1268	-	5	NA
2011 Apr	29	96	132	17	3	1279	1431	-	10	NA
2012 Apr	23	96	119	1016	301	0	1436	-	8	NA
2013 May	-	-	-	-	-	1640	1640	-	-	NA
2014 May	-	-	-	-	-	1617	1617	-	-	NA
2015 Apr	58	104	162	36	25	816	1583	-	21	NA
2016 Apr	31+19unc	67	117	523	255	891	1786	49	13	22
2017 Jan	96	56	152	34	26	1834	2046	-	-	NA
2018 Mar ⁸	40	80	120	1149	572	0	1841	49	7	10
2019 Mar	75	123	198	1094	623	0	1915	57	12	18

¹ Includes unclassified bulls.

² Based on total bulls and total cows and calves, includes 200 unclassified elk.

³ Calculated only in those years when at least 250 elk were classified.

⁴ To calculate bull:cow ratio in those years that all cows and calves were not classified I assumed that unclassified cows and calves were in the same proportion as those classified.

⁵ This flight was conducted by Dick Bucsis, wildlife biologist, White Sulphur Springs.

⁶ This flight was conducted by Claire Simmons, wildlife biologist, Big Timber.

⁷ Very poor survey conditions, cloudy windy and elk may have been undercounted.

⁸ Used the 2016 calf:cow ratio to calculate number of cows and calves in the large elk groups that couldn't be classified from the air.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 22. Harvest statistics for HD 540, 1970-2018.

Year	General Regulation	No. of Hunters	No. of Permits or Licenses	BAB	Spike s	Cows	Calve s	Unk .	Total
1988		717	75	35	32	28	5	0	99
1989		875	75	18	41	18	4	1	80
1990		716	75	36	29	24	1	0	90
1991 ¹		609	75	37	61	22	5	0	125
1992		658	75 ²	37	40	16	3	0	96
1993		913	75 ²	41	19	42	3	0	105
1994		923	75 ²	41	51	47	2	0	140
1995		826	75 ²	33	42	36	5	0	116
1999	Antlered Bull	886	125 ²	36	22	33	3	0	94
2000	Antlered Bull	967	175 ²	49	34	52	6	0	141
2001	Antlered Bull	767	175 ²	20	40	38	3	0	101
2002	Antlered Bull	831	175 ²	30	25	31	9	0	95
2003	Antlered Bull	990	175 ²	55	31	72	3	1	162
2004	Antlered Bull	938	175	42	12	77	10	0	141
2005	AB, Last 9 days ES	762	175	59	18	67	3	0	146
2006	AB, Last 9 days ES	664	175	69	22	54	2	0	147
2007	AB, Last 9 days ES	761	175	26	8	48	0	0	83
2008	Either-sex	831	50 ³	54	18	43	3	0	118
2009	Either-sex	770	50	33	36	42	8	0	119
2010	Either-sex	1008	50	72	22	102	37	0	234
2011	Either-sex	1081	50	80	22	127	24	0	253
2012	Either-sex	1073	50	61	11	73	6	0	151
2013	Either-sex	-	50	68	19	60	7	0	153
2014	Either-sex	1012	1200 ⁴	85	31	135	17	0	268
2015	Either-sex	1134	1200 ⁴	65	44	147	22	0	278
2016	Either-sex	1178	1300 ^{4,5}	61	19	151	13	0	243
2017	Either-sex	-	1500 ^{4,5}	128	46	178	15	0	366
2018	BTB or Ant-	1058	1500 ^{4,5}	88	3	166	21	0	277
Avg 1970-17		966		43	35	50	6		135
Dev. from Avg		10%		107%	-91%	233%	226%		105%

¹ Starting in 1991 individuals who possessed an antlerless elk permit could not shoot a bull in the hunting district the antlerless permit was valid for.

² Between 1992 and 2003 antlerless permits for this area were valid 6 days prior to the general season and for the entire season instead of two separate time-periods.

³ Prior to 2008 numbers in this column were for permits. Starting in 2008 the permits became a second license for antlerless elk.

⁴ Elk B-licenses were combined and valid for most Region 5 elk hunting districts (lpt 005-00).

⁵ 100 additional b-licenses were available in HD540 that were valid in entire district

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

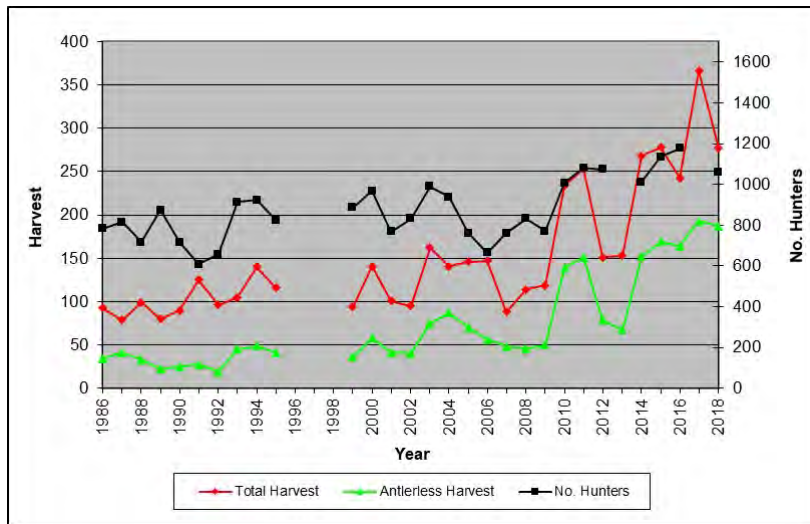


Fig. 1. Total harvest, antlerless harvest and hunter numbers in HD 540, 1986-2018.

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, temperature/precipitation information).

The current population exceeds the total population objective by 219% and bull numbers are 10% of the total elk observed during winter surveys. The elk plan has a minimum of 5% bulls among total elk observed during winter surveys. The 2019 elk survey was the second highest total elk count in HD540 (Table 2.) Bull harvest increased in 2017 to a record high, the deep snow during the general season made elk hunters more successful that year (Table 3). Bull harvest returned to average numbers in 2018 since the weather during the hunting season was more consistent with past weather patterns.

The habitat in hunting district 540 generally consists of open grassland benches surround by forest cover. A good portion of the district is private land with USFS land in the northern portion of the district. Elk in this district move between private land refuges, USFS land, Block Management areas, and private land that allows hunting. The Little Belt Mountains EMU is the first general license either-sex elk hunting opportunity for residents and nonresident hunters coming from the East. Many hunters are looking for the general elk license opportunity that the Little Belt Mountains EMU provides.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

This proposal will increase the opportunity for both resident and nonresident hunters to harvest bull elk in this district. It will give private landowners who wish to reduce bull elk numbers on their lands another tool to utilize if they decide to do so. Private landowners who want to restrict bull hunting on their property can do so without FWP regulations restricting elk harvest at the hunting district scale. No impacts to public and private land use are anticipated.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

Some of the landowners in HD540 like the brow-tined bull and antlerless season because they think it gives the bulls a chance to grow bigger. At the 2018 and 2019 hunter check stations in Lavina and Big Timber hunters were asked what they thought about the change in HD540 to brow-tined bull. The overwhelming majority of hunters did not like the change, and didn't understand why the regulation was made more restrictive if the hunting district is so far over objective for elk. A few hunters liked the change because they thought the regulation would allow spikes to grow for another year. Several hunters commented on the confusing regulation change. For example when hunting on USFS land and on one side of the road you can harvest spikes but on the other side of the Forest Service road you can't harvest spikes. This proposal was also discussed with the area game wardens, they would like to see the regulation changed to either-sex elk to have consistent general license regulations in the Little Belt Mountains to avoid confusion among hunters. With a large portion of elk in HD540 on private land if landowners want to restrict hunters from shooting spikes on their land they can do so. There is no biological reason to make a brow-tined bull regulation at the hunting district scale. No conflicts with landowners, sportsmen or other members of the public are anticipated.

Submitted by: Ashley Taylor/October 2019

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 5

Hunting District: 580

Year: 2020

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

The current elk season structure in HD 580 is an either sex season north of Sweet Grass Creek. The portion of 580 south of Sweet Grass Creek is a limited draw area for either sex elk for both archery and rifle seasons. Antlerless elk and spikes may be taken on a general license south of Sweet Grass Creek.

This season structure currently results in four district portions. Those are:

- a. portion north of Sweet Grass Creek-general either sex season,
 - b. portion between Sweet Grass Creek and Big Timber Creek-580-21 either sex permit area (25 permits),
 - c. portion between Big Timber Creek and West Fork Duck Creek-580-22 either sex permit area (40 permits),
 - d. portion South of Sweet Grass Creek-archery permit area which is the combination of 580-21 and 580-22 rifle permit areas (900-20 archery permit).
- (portions b,c,d are all south of Sweet Grass Creek)

The current season structure/portions have been in place for more than 15 years.

The proposal is to combine the 580-21 and 580-22 either sex permit areas into one either sex permit area which matches the archery permit area. This new area would be called 580-20 and would be described as the portion of HD 580 south of Sweet Grass Creek. 80 either sex elk permits would be offered, and the corresponding permit quota range would be 50-200.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The 580-21 and 580-22 permit areas are geographically small and elk are found primarily on private lands. Private land access ranges from access granted to friends and family, access through trespass fees or lease, or no access on some parcels. Hunters who draw a 580-21 or 580-22 elk permit are restricted to small areas with limited and difficult access. In 2018, there were 94 first choice applicants for the 25 either sex permits offered in 580-21. There were 106 first choice applicants for the 40 either sex permits offered in 580-22. Landowners in these two permit areas who wish to have bulls harvested on their lands are limited to small numbers of bull permit holders.

The objectives of the proposed change are to increase hunting opportunity for elk permit holders by providing a larger area and more landowners from which to potentially gain access and hunt. To provide more permit holders for landowners to use to reduce bull numbers on their land if they desire. To simplify the regulations by eliminating two district portions.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

FWP receives complaints from hunters each year about the small size of the two permit areas and the difficulty of access to private lands within those areas. We also receive complaints from landowners who experience game damage from bulls and ask us to provide more harvest opportunity for bulls. Finally we receive numerous questions about the complex permit structure in HD 580. Success will be measured by the reduction in hunter and landowner complaints as well as reduced questions about season structure from hunters and landowners. While we don't anticipate a large increase in harvest, we hope this simplification and structure change will provide more flexibility and opportunities for hunters and landowners. This should result in some increase in bull harvest south of Sweet Grass Creek.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 1. Elk numbers and classification observed on winter ranges in HD 580, 2019.

	Bulls			Cows	Calves	Unc. Ant-	Total Elk (objective)	Ratios Bull:Cow:Calves
	BTB	Yrl	Tot.					
<u>Cottonwood Creek to 16 Mile Creek</u>								
	19	40	59	400	95	---	554 (250)	15:100:24
<u>Sweet Grass Creek to Cottonwood Creek</u>								
	108	102	210	1,900	481	---	2,591 (500)	11:100:25
<u>Big Timber Creek to Sweet Grass Creek</u>								
	91	20	111	82	11	---	204 (100)	135:100:13
<u>Big Timber Creek to West Fork Duck Creek</u>								
	164	52	216	475	130	---	821 (125)	45:100:27
<u>Hunting District 580</u>								
2019	382	214	596	2,857	717		4,170 (975)	21:100:25

Table 2. Elk numbers and classification observed between Big Timber Creek and Sweet Grass Creek in HD 580 (580-21), 2001-2019.

Year	Bulls			Cows	Calves	Unc. Ant-	Total Elk	Ratios Bull:Cow:Calves
	BTB	Yrl	Tot.					
2001	17	4	21	26	10		57	81:100:38
2002	13	5	18	32	14		64	56:100:44
2003	27	11	38	34	20		92	112:100:59
2004	30	1	31	45	25		101	69:100:56
2005	16	6	22	39	13		74	56:100:33
2006	1	5	6	4	1	41	52	16:100:25 ³
2007	29	4	33	72	17		122	46:100:24
2008	20	8	28	71	21		120	39:100:30
2009	108	30	138	94	31		263	147:100:33
2010	95	18	113	85	27		225	133:100:32
2011	114	33	147	148	49		344	99:100:33
2012	181	16	197	171	47		415	115:100:27
2013	180	26	206	95	34		335	217:100:36
2014	118	26	151 ¹	89	21		261	170:100:24
2015	185	8	193	99	17		309	195:100:17
2016	164	15	179	100	29		308	179:100:29
2017	139	22	161	94	28		283	171:100:30
2018	125	12	137	111	31		279	123:100:28
2019	91	20	111	82	11		204	135:100:13

¹ In some years total bulls are greater than the sum of BTB and yearling bulls. The additional bulls listed in the total column are the result of unclassified bulls which had already shed antlers at the time of survey.

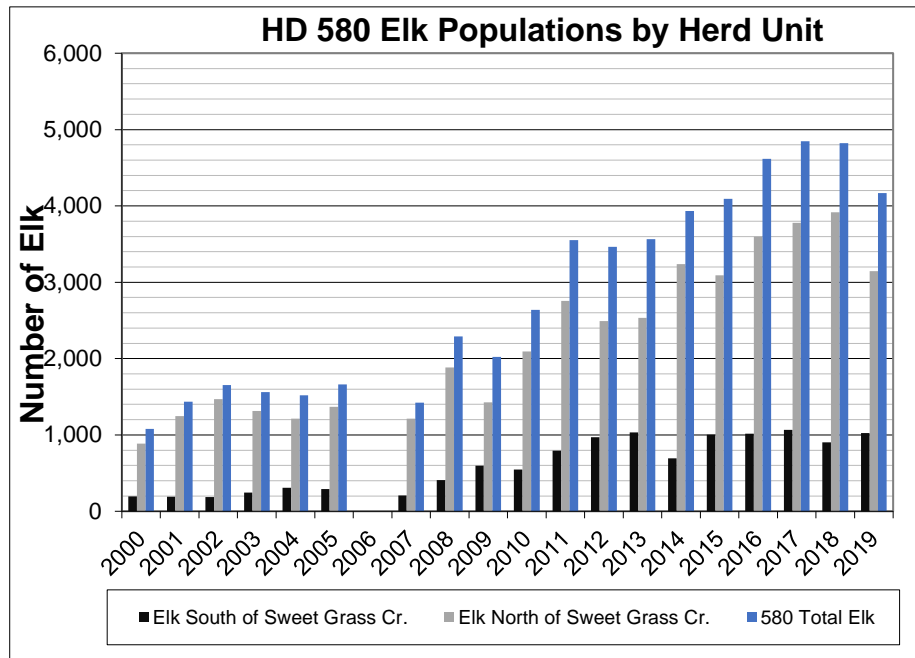
2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 3. Elk numbers and classification observed between Big Timber Creek and West Fork Duck Creek in HD 580 (580-22), 2001-2019.

Year	Bulls			Cows	Calves	Unc. Ant-	Total Elk	Ratios Bull:Cow:Calves
	BTB	Yrl	Tot.					
2001	12	13	34	70	29		133	49:100:41
2002	31	10	41	58	23		122	71:100:40
2003	31	10	41	--	--	113	154	26.6% bulls
2004	51	16	68	103	36		207	66:100:35
2005	4	11	76	102	41		219	75:100:40
2006	39	15	54	25	9		88	216:100:36
2007	71	4	75	9	3		87	833:100:33
2008	24	5	29	189	70		288	15:100:37
2009	52	8	60	208	68		336	29:100:33
2010	118	37	155	138	27		320	112:100:20
2011	93	45	138	250	63		451	55:100:25
2012	160	25	185	305	67		557	61:100:22
2013	221	32	253	330	115		698	77:100:35
2014	85	21	106	260	67		433	41:100:26
2015	168	49	217	384	94		695	57:100:24
2016	155	38	193	380	136		709	51:100:36
2017	181	41	222	451	112		785	49:100:25
2018	167	33	200	347	78		625	58:100:22
2019	164	52	216	475	130		821	45:100:27

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Figure 1. Elk Population trends by herd unit in HD 580, 2000-2019.



2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 4. History of general license season structure, either sex permits, and elk B licenses in HD 580, 2010-2019.

Year	General License Season Structure	580-21 Either Sex Permits	580-22 Either Sex Permits	Archery Permits valid South of Sweet Grass Creek	Elk B licenses						
2010	Either Sex Elk north of Sweet Grass Creek. Cr; Antlerless Elk south of Sweet Grass Cr.	15	25	110	300						
2011		25	40	115	300 HD 580 1,000 valid on private lands outside BMA's in all archery permit districts						
2012				130							
2013				Either Sex Elk north of Sweet Grass Creek. Cr; Spike bull or antlerless Elk south of Sweet Grass Cr.	35	3,700	1,200 B Licenses valid in R5 outside National Forest, 1,000 Elk B valid in private lands outside BMA's in all archery permit districts.				
2014	25	3,700			1,200 B Licenses valid on private land only. 50 B licenses valid on all lands in 580.						
2015				Either Sex Elk north of Sweet Grass Creek. Cr; Spike bull or antlerless Elk south of Sweet Grass Cr.			1,500 B Licenses not valid on Natl Forest. 50 B licenses valid on all lands in 580.				
2016								Early and late shoulder seasons Aug 15-Jan 1.	2,500 B Licenses not valid on Natl Forest. 50 B licenses valid on all lands in 580.		
2017										Either Sex Elk north of Sweet Grass Creek. Cr; Spike bull or antlerless Elk south of Sweet Grass Cr.	2,500 B Licenses not valid on Natl Forest. 50 B licenses valid on all lands in 580.
2018											
2019											

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 5. HD 580 Total Elk Harvest, 2010-2019. Includes all harvest, north and south of Sweet Grass Creek.

Year	Total Elk Harvest	Antlered Bull Harvest	Antlerless Elk Harvest
2010	385	185	200
2011	349	180	169
2012	393	211	182
2013	411	191	220
2014	422	218	204
2015	555	236	318
2016	487	248	239
2017	622	283	340
2018	723	283	440
2019			
Avg	423	199	223

Table 6. Either-sex permit Harvest for 580-21 portion HD 580, 2004-2018.

Year	ES Permits	ES Harvest	ES Har. Rate	6pt or greater	% 6pt or greater
2004	10	5	0.50	4	0.00
2005	15	6	0.40	6	1.00
2006	15	6	0.40	5	0.83
2007	15	6	0.40	6	1.00
2008	15	5	0.33	5	1.00
2009	15	8	0.53	8	1.00
2010	15	5	0.33	4	0.80
2011	15	5	0.33	5	1.00
2012	25	10	0.40	10	1.00
2013	25	15	0.60	15	1.00
2014	35	5	0.14	4	0.80
2015	25	4	0.16	4	1.00
2016	25	2	0.08	2	1.00
2017	25	9	0.36	9	1.00
2018	25	3	0.12	0	0.00
Avg.		6.3	0.3	5.8	0.8

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 7. Either-sex permit Harvest for 580-22 portion HD 580, 2004-2018.

Year	ES Permits	ES Harvest	ES Har. Rate	6pt or greater	% 6pt or greater
2004	10	6	0.60	6	1.00
2005	15	5	0.33	4	0.80
2006	25	8	0.32	6	0.75
2007	25	11	0.44	8	0.73
2008	25	12	0.48	9	0.75
2009	25	10	0.40	8	0.80
2010	25	14	0.56	8	0.57
2011	25	5	0.20	5	1.00
2012	40	13	0.33	8	0.62
2013	40	7	0.18	5	0.71
2014	40	15	0.38	11	0.73
2015	40	11	0.28	11	1.00
2016	40	5	0.13	5	1.00
2017	40	11	0.28	9	0.82
2018	40	11	0.28	9	0.82
Avg.		9.60	0.34	7.47	0.81

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Weather conditions does not play a role in this proposal. Hunter/landowner and private land access considerations are addressed above.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal has been discussed and supported by local FWP enforcement personnel. This proposal has not been discussed with local landowners or sportsmen. No conflicts from landowners or sportsmen are anticipated.

Submitted by: **Justin Paugh**

Date: **10/9/19**

Approved:

Regional Supervisor / Date

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Disapproved / Modified by:

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: ELK

Region: 6

Hunting Districts: 620/621/622/630/631/632

Year: 2020-2021

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Region 6 proposes to eliminate the 620-00 antlerless archery elk B-License. This B-license was initiated during the 2008 hunting season and is valid in Region 6 Breaks EMU HDs 620, 621, and 622, but is only valid during the archery season and has been one of the licenses that the area has seen some of the lowest success with over the years. The quota range for these licenses is from 100-500 permits with a current quota of 300.

Region 6 also proposes to change the structure of the 621-01, 622-00, 631-00, and the 632-00 elk b-license so that it is valid during the Archery Only Season and the General Season (currently it is only valid during the General Season) to add additional opportunity to those licenses.

2. **What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The main objective of this proposal is to contribute to the simplification of the hunting regulations and licensing, by eliminating a LPT. The secondary objective is to maintain a license type that will

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

allow for hunter flexibility to pursue elk during multiple seasons in HDs where elk are over management objective and increase opportunity.

How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be primarily measured using annual harvest surveys, aerial trend surveys, and hunter and landowner reports.

3. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The population objective identified in the elk management plan is for 1700-2000 total observed elk for the Region 6 portion of the Missouri Breaks Elk Management Unit (EMU), with a sub-objective of 1400-1650 elk in hunting districts 620,621, and 622 and 300-350 elk in hunting districts 630,631, and 632. The Region 6 Breaks EMU is currently surveyed biennially. Recent elk harvest survey data is provided in Table 2.

Table1. Elk Aerial Survey data in Region 6 Missouri River Breaks Hunting District 2006-2018

	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Elk Observed HDs 620-621-622	3149	3148	2868	2493	1935	1950	2869	1662
Elk Observed HDs 630-631-632	1076	939	256	446	443	646	535	632
R6 Breaks Total	4225	4087	3124	2939	2378	2596	3404	2294
<i>% over objective</i>	106%	99%	52%	43%	16%	27%	70%	15%

Table 2. Region 6 620-00 antlerless elk B-License estimated harvest from 2010-2018.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Year	# of Licenses	Harvest	Percent Successful
2010	300	35	12%
2011	300	30	10%
2012	300	25	8%
2013	300	9	3%
2014	300	10	3%
2015	300	42	14%
2016	300	25	8%
2017	300	18	6%
2018	300	24	8%

4. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Overall weather conditions the past several years have varied but we have seen relatively adequate spring precipitation, and this has contributed to higher elk survival and recruitment. Severe drought conditions were present throughout most of Regions 6 during the summer of 2017. Weather conditions have been variable during the archery and general season timeframe. Excessive precipitation during the fall of 2016 and 2019 limited hunter access to many areas in the Missouri River Breaks. In 2017, the latter portion of the season had severe winter weather which greatly prohibited hunter access. In 2018, the first year of the lengthened season, the weather was very mild allowing for good hunter access. Overall, the longer “general season” has created more opportunity for elk hunters to find elk during better weather conditions, secure access, and get elk harvested.

Hunter access continues to be a primary factor limiting elk harvest in the Region 6 Breaks EMU. Private lands in the Larb Hills of HD 622 with very limited access has resulted in problematic concentrations of elk. However, in 2018 hunters gained significantly more access to private land through a HB454 agreement during the general season with a large private landowner in the Larb Hills. This agreement resulted in a number of cows being harvested on private land and a slight redistribution of elk across the landscape.

5. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

A discussion about the elimination of the 620-00 archery elk b-license while making the other b-licenses LPTs (621-01, 622-00, 631-00, and 632-00) valid during archery season as well as general season in the Missouri River Breaks was had with the Breaks Elk Working Group in 2019. There were a variety of views on the topic with great discussion had and there was fear from archery hunters of overcrowding occurring with an increase in licenses that would be valid during the archery season. While looking at the harvest metrics gathered during hunter harvest surveys it shows that minimal effort is put forth on similar licenses during the archery season and that there would be potentially no difference observed while in the field while still reducing an LPT and providing for more opportunity on current licenses (Table 3 & 4). Landowners in the area were generally in favor of increasing opportunity through such a change. Multiple conversations with sportsmen both in the field and while on the phone seemed to think that this change would help reduce the number of LPTs while still providing for opportunity.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 3. Showing four similar elk b-licenses that provide opportunity during both archery and general season with estimated success for each license from 2014-2018.

LPT	Archery Harvest	Licenses Issued	Elk Harvest/License Issued
004-00			
2014	43.1	3717	0.01
2015	29.1	4811	0.01
2016	36.8	4801	0.01
2017	51.1	4811	0.01
2018	58.9	4803	0.01
005-00			
2014	4.6	1093	0.00
2015	15.5	1200	0.01
2016	6.8	1202	0.01
2017	24.2	4801	0.01
2018	3.3	1501	0.00
799-00		1499	0.00
2014	2	200	0.01
2015	0	200	0.00
2016	0	400	0.00
2017	2.6	400	0.01
2018	10.5	600	0.02
007-00			
2016	2.7	500	0.01
2017	1.9	500	0.00
2018	18.3	800	0.02
AVG			0.008

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 4. Projected harvest for proposed license change using the average success rate from similar, current licenses to generate a metric that can be used to gauge any difference in success equating to perceived, potential over-crowding.

Region 6 Antlerless LPT	Quota	Projected Harvest
622-00	500	3.8
621-00	100	0.8
631-00	100	0.8
632-00	10	0.1
Total	710	5.4
Current Average 620-00 Harvest	300 licenses	7.3

Submitted by: Brett Dorak, Malta Area Wildlife Biologist

Date:

Approved: _____.

Mark Sullivan-Regional Supervisor

Disapproved / Modified by:

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: ELK

Region: 6

Hunting Districts: 620/621/622/630/631/632

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Year: 2020-2021

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

Region 6 proposes to eliminate the 698-00 antlerless elk permit. This permit was initiated during the 2016 hunting season. The permit is valid in Region 6 Breaks EMU HDs 620, 621, 622, 630, 631, and 632, but is only valid on land outside the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR) for antlerless elk. The quota range for these licenses is from 100-500 permits.

Region 6 also proposes to change the structure of the 699-00 elk license (currently known as the "shoulder season license").

Currently, the 699-00 license is structured as follows:

- Valid off the CMR, within hunting districts 620, 621, 622, 630, 631 and 632, during the special shoulder season from December 15th to January 15th.

The newly proposed license structure for 699-00 is as follows:

- Valid off the CMR, within hunting districts 620, 621, 622, 630, and 631, during the Archery Only Season, during the General Season, and during the special Shoulder Season (proposed here to run from December 15 – February 15).

2. **What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The main objective of this proposal is to contribute to the simplification of the hunting regulations and licensing, by eliminating an LPT. The secondary objective is to maintain a license type that will allow for hunter flexibility to pursue elk in multiple districts, in areas that are comprised of private land where elk game damage problems may occur and elk are over management objective.

How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be primarily measured using annual harvest surveys, aerial trend surveys, and hunter and landowner reports.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

3. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

The population objective identified in the elk management plan is for 1700-2000 total observed elk for the Region 6 portion of the Missouri Breaks Elk Management Unit (EMU), with a sub-objective of 1400-1650 elk in hunting districts 620,621, and 622 and 300-350 elk in hunting districts 630,631, and 632. The Region 6 Breaks EMU is currently surveyed biennially. Recent elk survey data is provided in Table 2.

Table1. Elk Aerial Survey data in Region 6 Missouri River Breaks Hunting District 2006-2018

	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Elk Observed HDs 620-621-622	3149	3148	2868	2493	1935	1950	2869	1662
Elk Observed HDs 630-631-632	1076	939	256	446	443	646	535	632
R6 Breaks Total	4225	4087	3124	2939	2378	2596	3404	2294
<i>% over objective</i>	106%	99%	52%	43%	16%	27%	70%	15%

Table 2. Region 6 699-00 Shoulder Season Elk and 698-00 Permit Harvest in 2016, 2017, 2018.

LPT	Year	Quota	Harvest
<i>699-00</i>	2016	500	71
<i>699-00</i>	2017	500	39
<i>699-00</i>	2018	500	52

LPT	Year	Quota	Harvest
<i>698-00</i>	2016	300	57
<i>698-00</i>	2017	300	47
<i>698-00</i>	2018	300	41

4. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Overall weather conditions the past several years have varied but we have seen relatively adequate spring precipitation, and this has contributed to higher elk survival and recruitment. Severe drought conditions were present throughout most of Region 6 during the summer of 2017. Weather conditions have been variable during the general and shoulder season timeframe. Excessive precipitation during the fall of 2016 limited hunter access to many areas in the Missouri River Breaks. In 2017, the latter portion of the season had severe winter weather which greatly prohibited hunter access. In 2018, the first year of the lengthened season, the weather was very mild allowing for good hunter access. Overall, the longer “general season” has created more opportunity for elk hunters to find elk during better weather conditions, secure access, and get elk harvested.

Hunter access continues to be a primary factor limiting elk harvest in the Region 6 Breaks EMU. Private lands in the Larb Hills of HD 622 with very limited access has resulted in problematic concentrations of elk. However, in 2018 hunters gained significantly more access to private land through a HB454 agreement during the general season with a large private landowner in the Larb Hills. This agreement resulted in a number of cows being harvested on private land, a slight redistribution of elk across the landscape, and anecdotally slightly more access during the shoulder season, but in the latter portion of the season the elk responded by seeking refuge in other nearby inaccessible areas.

5. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

A discussion about the 699-00 and 698-00 LPTs in the Missouri River Breaks was had with the Breaks Elk Working Group in 2019. There were a variety of views on the LPTs, but overall the need for less pressure on elk to allow for elk to be better distributed on the landscape was expressed, but also allow some harvest opportunity was a consistent theme. Additional contacts with landowners in the Breaks EMU, mostly indicated support for a reduction in shoulder season licenses or hunting during the later season. This is seen as a good compromise to distribute hunter pressure and maintain opportunity, that will also simplify seasons and regulations. The CMR would still like to encourage more elk use on the Refuge so would be supportive of less or limited harvest.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Date:

Approved:_____.

Mark Sullivan-Regional Supervisor

Disapproved / Modified by:

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 6

Hunting District: HD 620/621/622/630/631/632/680/690

Year: 2020

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

This proposal is to consolidate the three Region 6 youth antlerless elk licenses into one youth antlerless elk license that would be valid in both the Region 6 Breaks Elk Hunting Districts (HD 620, 621, 622, 630, 631, and 632) and the Bears Paw Hunting Districts (HD 680 and 690). Currently there are three separate youth elk licenses in the Region which are:

- 1) LPT 621-00 (Quota 100) valid in HD 620, 621, and 622
- 2) LPT 631-01 (Quota 25) valid in HD 630, 631, and 632
- 3) LPT 690-00 (Quota 25) valid in HD 680 and 690.

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

This proposal would eliminate these three licenses and replace them with one multi-district license with a quota of 200 licenses. This would be an increase from the current combined quota of 150 licenses for these districts. These elk licenses would be available to youth (12-15). The season dates for these licenses would begin two days before the start of the general season and would be valid for the rest of the general season.

2. What is the objective of this proposed change?

The primary objective of this change would be to reduce the complexity of the Region 6 elk regulations and provide increase flexibility for youth hunters by reducing the limitations on where they can hunt. The increase in the overall license quota may provide some limited additional antlerless elk harvest.

3. How will the success of this proposal be measured?

Success of this proposal would be seen in the 2020 regulations where the number of youth licenses LPT codes will be reduced from 3 to 1. The additional 50 licenses and flexibility given to these youth hunters may also result in a slight increase in elk harvest that would be measured through the annual hunter harvest surveys.

4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

Table 1. Region 6 Missouri Breaks and Bears Paw Elk Management Units Survey Data

	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Breaks EMU	3124	2999	2368	2596	3404	2294
Bears Paw EMU	193	692	394	731	435	647
Region 6	3317	3631	2762	3327	3839	2941

Table 2. Region 6 Youth License Elk Harvest

**2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range,
Justifications**

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
LPT						
621-00 Harvest	13	4	37	24	10	24
Quota	100	100	100	100	100	100
631-01 Harvest	9	1	0	5	3	2
Quota	25	25	25	25	25	25
690-00 Harvest	4	3	6	2	0	2
Quota	25	25	25	25	25	25
Total	26	8	43	31	13	28
Quota	150	150	150	150	150	150

5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Overall, there is good hunter access though public land and block management cooperators throughout most of the hunting districts included in this proposal. There is much less public land access in HD 690, which has historically been a major factor limiting elk harvest in this district. Weather conditions were more severe during the winter of 2017-2018, but did not appear to have an impact on elk survival or production. Weather conditions have been favorable this past year for elk production and survival with a shorter winter and with above average precipitation during the spring and summer of 2018.

6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

This proposal was presented to the Breaks Elk Working Group. The majority of comments received during this meeting were supportive of this proposal. The opportunity to potentially increase cow harvest, provide more youth opportunity, and recruit more hunters were all provided as benefits of

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

this proposal. One concern raised about the proposal was that it could lead to a greater concentration of hunters in some districts.

Submitted by: Scott Hemmer

Date: 10/21/19

Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: ELK
Region: 6
Hunting Districts: 630/631
Year: 2020-21

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

Region 6 proposes to change the lower quota range of 631-00 elk B licenses from 65 to 1 (table 1)

Table 1. Elk 631-00 B License quota history

LPT	Valid in HD	Elk B-License Quota	
		Current Quota Range	<i>Proposed Quota Range</i>
631-00	630 and 631	65-150	1-150

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.

The objective of this proposal is to allow for more flexibility in cow elk license allocation for the 631-00 lpt.

How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.

The success of this proposal will be primarily measured using annual harvest surveys, aerial trend surveys, and hunter and landowner reports.

3. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).

The population objective identified in the elk management plan is for 1700-2000 total observed elk for the Region 6 portion of the Missouri Breaks Elk Management Unit (EMU), with a sub-objective of 300-350 elk in hunting districts 630,631, and 632. The Region 6 Breaks EMU is currently surveyed biennially. Recent elk survey data is provided in Table 2. While the portion of the population in 631 and 632 is currently above objective, it is widely (however anecdotally) known that the elk observed in 631 during winter aerial surveys are not likely present during the following hunting season in as great of numbers.

Elk harvest in 631 has seen declines since 2010 and was at its lowest on record in 2018 (table 3). The quota range reduction will allow the option for a further future reduction in this license type, while still allowing for some opportunity for harvest, but should allow for a decrease in hunting pressure which may result in better elk distribution in the hunting district.

Table2. Elk Aerial Survey data in Region 6 Missouri River Breaks Hunting District 2006-2018

	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Elk Observed HDs 620-621-622	3149	3148	2868	2493	1935	1950	2869	1662
Elk Observed HDs 630-631-632	1076	939	256	446	443	646	535	632
R6 Breaks Total	4225	4087	3124	2939	2378	2596	3404	2294
<i>% over objective</i>	106%	99%	52%	43%	16%	27%	70%	15%

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

Table 3. Region 6 631-00 Elk Harvest since 2009.

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Licenses Issued	70	120	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Harvest %	47.14%	29.17%	36.00%	24.00%	20.00%	15.00%	39.00%	14.00%	22.00%	10.00%

4. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).

Overall weather conditions the past several years have varied but we have seen relatively adequate spring precipitation, and this has contributed to good elk survival and recruitment. Severe drought conditions were present throughout most of Regions 6 during the summer of 2017. Weather conditions have been variable during the season timeframe, but overall hunter accessibility has been good.

Hunter access on private land continues to be a primary factor limiting elk harvest in the Region 6 Breaks EMU. Private lands in the Larb Hills of HD 622 with very limited access has resulted in problematic concentrations of elk, many of which come from hunting district 631 when pressured.

5. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).

A discussion about this license was had with the Breaks Elk Working Group in 2019. There were a variety of views, but overall the need for less pressure on elk to allow for elk to be better distributed on the landscape was expressed, but also allow some harvest opportunity was a consistent theme. Additional contacts with landowners in the Breaks EMU, mostly indicated support for a reduction in these licenses. Numerous hunter contacts have indicated frustration with the lack of elk in HD's 632 and 631; with most calling for a reduction. The CMR would still like to encourage more elk use on the Refuge so would be supportive of less or limited harvest.

Submitted by: Drew Henry

Date:

Approved: _____.
Mark Sullivan-Regional Supervisor

Disapproved / Modified by:

Reason for Modification:

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Elk

Region: 6

Hunting District: 680/690

Year: 2020

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).

This proposal is to allow antlerless elk hunting with a general license in HDs 680/690 (proposed to be combined into one hunting district in 2020). Currently in this hunting district elk hunting is only through licenses and permits issued through a limited drawing. In 2019, there were 300 antlerless elk licenses, 25 antlerless youth licenses, 100 antlerless elk permit, and 100 antlerless elk shoulder season licenses. This proposal would eliminate the 696-00 elk permit, and 697-00 elk license. As part of this proposal, the 690-01 antlerless elk license quota would be reduced to 150 licenses which would be valid during both the general season and the elk shoulder season. Either-sex elk harvest is also currently on a limited draw with 35 either-sex archery permits and 35 either sex rifle permits. This proposal would increase the quota for 690-21 archery either-sex permits from 35 permit to 50 permits and change the quota range from 15-50 permits to 15-100 permits.

Table 1. Antlerless Elk License/Permit Quotas in HDs 680-690 from 2015-2019

LPT	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
690-00 Youth	25	25	25	25	25
690-01	300	300	300	300	300
696-00	--	100	100	100	100
697-00	--	100	100	100	100
Total	325	525	525	525	525

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

LPT	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 Proposed
690-20	35	35	35	35	35	35
690-21	35	35	35	35	35	50

- 2. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of this change is to increase antlerless elk harvest in the elk management unit. Elk numbers in this unit have been increasing and recently have been significantly above the objective for this unit. Through increased elk harvest the goal is to slow the population growth in this unit and bring elk numbers down toward objective. Allowing antlerless elk harvest on a general license will provide an additional tool for harvesting elk that will provide additional flexibility for hunters and landowners to address concentrations of elk and elk damage issues.

- 3. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

The success of this proposal will be measured through annual elk harvest statistics and elk aerial trend surveys. Elk harvest in this unit has averaged 64 antlerless elk each year and the goal of this proposal would be to increase the annual elk harvest in this management unit, ideally to a level that can stabilize or reduce the elk population in this unit toward objective.

- 4. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

The most recent survey in this unit counted 190 elk which is currently below objective, but the survey conditions for this count were very poor and was not an accurate representation of the population status of elk in this district. The previous year (2018) there were 647 elk counted in this unit which was 159% above the management objective of 250 elk (Table 2).

Table 2. Bears Paw Elk Management Unit Aerial Survey Data 2014-2019

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Count	731	415	435	523	647	190
Calf: Cow	37	33	49	46	43	32
Bull:Cow	73	33	50	22	40	29

Overall harvest in this elk management unit has averaged 104 elk during the last 5 years. However, antlerless elk harvest has only averaged 64 elk. The average antlerless elk harvest success during the past five years has been 13%

Table 3. Bears Paw EMU Elk Harvest 2014-2018

LPT	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
690-00 Antlerless Youth	3	6	2	0	2
690-01 Antlerless	22	84	39	33	43
690-20 (Either-sex)	23	26	30	22	21
690-21 Either-sex Archery	23	21	15	17	14
696-00 Antlerless Shoulder Season	--		11	8	10
697-00 Antlerless Permit	--		20	6	17
Total	71	137	117	86	107

2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range, Justifications

- 5. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Weather in this district has not had a significant impact on elk populations or harvest. The winter of 2018-2019 was relatively short without long periods of deep snow. Even in severe winters elk in this unit generally do not experience significant levels of winter mortality. Precipitation this year has been higher and vegetation conditions are currently very good. The district has a large percentage of private land and limited public access has been one of the primary factors restricting elk harvest in these hunting districts.

- 6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

This proposal has been discussed with several landowners in the area and most landowners contacted have been supportive of this proposal. Comments in favor of this proposal have indicated that this change will provide them increased flexibility to find antlerless elk hunters when the transitory elk herds are present on their property during the hunting season. Another benefit was that this proposal may help promote dispersal of elk off areas where the current level of hunting access is insufficient to prevent large concentrations of elk. Concerns with the proposal have primarily been related to the potential increase in hunter numbers in this unit and the potential to push elk off of currently accessible public and private land.

Submitted by: Scott Hemmer

Date: _____ Approved: _____

Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____

Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

**2018-2019 Elk Hunting Seasons and Quota Range,
Justifications**

LPT	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
690-00 Antlerless Youth	3	6	2	0	2
690-01 Antlerless	22	84	39	33	43
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